THEY WALKED ARM IN ARM, OCCUPYING THE WHOLE OF THE STREET. CHAP. 10.

THE THREE GUARDSMEN

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By ALEXANDER DUMAS

Author of "The Count of Monte Cristo," "The Man in the Iron Mask," "The Son of Porthos," "Twenty Years After," Etc.

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THE THREE MUSKETEERS

CHAPTER I.

THE FATHER'S THREE GIFTS.

On the first Monday in April, 1625, Meung Town seemed to be upset much as though the Huguenots had come to turn it into a new Rochelle. Many burghers, seeing women in flight from the Main Street, and hearing children cry on the doorsteps hastened to don breastplates and fortify themselves with a musket or a partisan, before directing their march to the Free Miller Inn, where a mob was swelling every minute, uproarious and full of curiosity.

These were the days when panics were frequent, and few passed without some town clerk recording an event of this sort. The noblemen warred among themselves; the King was at odds with the Cardinal, and the Spaniards crossed swords with the King. Besides these conflicts, secret or public, stealthy or riotous, the thieves, beggars, Protestants, footmen and wolves fought against everybody else. The good citizens took up arms against wolves, footpads and footmen—often against the nobles and the Huguenots—sometimes against the King—but never against the King and the Spaniards. From this habit, on the Monday mentioned, the townsfolk, aroused by the hubbub, and seeing neither the Spanish colors nor the livery of the Cardinal-Duke of Richelieu, flew towards the inn. There the cause of the hullaballoo could be ascertained.

It was a young man. To draw his portrait at a stroke, imagine Don Quixote at the age of eighteen, out of the suit of armor, and clad in a doublet of which the original deep blue had faded into a sky-blue tint or of wine lees. The salient cheekbones of the long, dark face denoted astuteness; the enormous development of the jaw muscles were an infallible token that here was a son of Gascony, if he had not worn the national bag-cap, in which was stuck a kind of plume; the eyes were open and intelligent; the hook nose finely chiselled; he was too tall for a youth but not large enough for a man; an unaccustomed observer would have taken him for the son of some farmer on his travels, but for the long sword which proclaimed the gentleman privilege to bear one; it dangled from a leather baldrick, and banded the wearer's calves when he was afoot, and wore away the hairy hide of his steed when he was mounted.

For he had come on a steed so remarkable that it was indeed noticed, being a Béarn pony, twelve to fourteen years old, yellow in hue, without a hair on his tail, but not without windgalls on his legs, which, though going with his head lower than his knees, rendering a martingale quite unnecessary, performed eight leagues a day. Unfortunately, the good points of the horse were so well concealed under his strange-colored hide and his unaccountable gait, that at a time when everybody was a judge of horseflesh, the appearance of the said pony at Meung, which place he had entered about a quarter of an hour before, produced an unfavorable sensation, which extended to his rider.

And this feeling had been the more painful to young Louis d'Artagnan—for so was the Don Quixote of this second Rosinante named—from his not being able to conceal from himself the ridiculous appearance that such a steed gave him, good horseman as he was. He had sighed deeply, therefore, when accepting the gift of the pony from d'Artagnan the elder. He was not ignorant that such a beast was worth at least twenty livres; but the words which accompanied the gift were above all price.

"My son," said the old Gascon nobleman, "this horse was born in the house of your father, about thirteen years ago, and has remained in it ever since, which ought to make you love it. Never sell it—allow it to die tranquilly and honorably of old age; and if you make a campaign with it, take as much care of it as you would of an old servant. At court, provided you have ever the honor to go there," continued old d'Artagnan, "an honor to which, remember, your ancient nobility gives you right, sustain worthily your name of *gentleman*, worthily borne by your ancestors during five hundred years, both for your own sake and that of your relations and friends. Endure nothing from any one but the Cardinal and the King. It is by his courage, mark, courage alone, that a gentleman can make his way nowadays. Whoever trembles for a second perhaps allows the prize to escape, which, during that very second, fortune held out. You are young; you ought to be brave for two reasons—first, you are a Gascon, second that you are my son. Never fear quarrels, seek adventures. I have taught you how to handle a sword; you have thews of iron, and wrists of steel; fight on all occasions; fight the more for duels being forbidden, since, consequently, there is twice as much courage in fighting. I have nothing to give you, my son, but fifteen crowns, my horse, and the counsels you have just heard. Your mother will add to them a recipe for a balsam, which she had from a gipsy, with the miraculous virtue of curing all wounds that do not affect the heart. Make profit of all, and live long and happily. I have but one word to add, and that is to propose an example to you—not mine, for I myself have never appeared at court, and have only taken part in war as a volunteer; I speak of Captain de Treville, formerly my neighbor, and who had the honor to be as a child, the playfellow of our king, Louis XIII., whom God preserve! Sometimes their play degenerated into battles, and the King was not always the stronger.

The blows which he received gave him great esteem and friendship for Treville. Afterwards, Treville fought with others; a hundred times perhaps! So that in spite of edicts, ordinances, and decrees, there he is a Captain of the Musketeers—that is to say, leader of a legion of Cæsars, whom the King holds in great esteem, and whom the Cardinal dreads—he who dreads nothing, as it is said. Still further, M. de Treville gains ten thousand crowns a year; he is, therefore, a very great Lord. He began as you begin; go to him with this letter, and make him your model, in order that you may do as he has done."

Upon which the elder d'Artagnan girded his own sword round his son, kissed him tenderly on both cheeks, and gave him his blessing.

On leaving the paternal chamber, the young man found his mother, who was waiting for him with the famous recipe, of which the above counsels would necessitate the frequent employment. The farewell on his side was longer and more tender than on the other; not that d'Artagnan did not love his only offspring, but d'Artagnan was a man, and considered it unmanly to give way to his feelings; where as Madame d'Artagnan was a woman, and a mother. She wept abundantly, and, let us speak to the praise of M. d'Artagnan the younger, notwithstanding the efforts he made to be as firm as a future Musketeer ought to be, nature prevailed, and he shed many tears, of which he succeeded with great difficulty in concealing the half.

The same day the youth set on his journey, furnished with the three paternal gifts; fifteen crowns, the horse, and the letter for Captain de Treville, the counsel being thrown into the bargain.

With such a *vade mecum* d'Artagnan was, morally and physically, an exact copy of the hero of Cervantes, who took windmills for giants, and sheep for armies; d'Artagnan took every smile for an insult, and every look as a provocation; whence it resulted that from Tarbes to Meung his fist was constantly doubled, or his hand on his sword hilt; and yet the fist did not fall on any jaw, nor did the sword issue from its scabbard. It was not that the sight of the wretched pony did not excite numerous smiles on the countenances of passers-by; but as against the side of this pony rattled a sword of respectable length, and as over this sword gleamed an eye rather ferocious than haughty, these said passers-by repressed their hilarity, or, if hilarity prevailed over prudence, endeavored to laugh only on one side, like the masks of the ancients. D'Artagnan, then, remained majestic and intact in his susceptibility till he came to this unlucky borough of Meung.

But there, as he was alighting from his horse at the inn gate, without any one, host, waiter, or hostler, coming to hold his stirrup or take his horse, d'Artagnan spied, through an open window on the ground floor, a gentleman well made and of good carriage, although of rather a stern countenance, talking with two persons who appeared to listen to him with deference. D'Ar-

tagnan fancied quite naturally, according to his custom, that he must be the object of their conversation, and listened. This time d'Artagnan was only in part mistaken; he himself was not criticized, but his horse was. The gentleman appeared to be enumerating all his points to his auditors, they every moment burst into fits of laughter. Now, as a half a smile was sufficient to awaken the irascibility of the young man, the effect produced upon him by this vociferous mirth may be easily imagined.

Nevertheless, d'Artagnan was desirous of examining this impertinent personage laughing at him. He fixed his haughty eye upon the stranger, and perceived a man between forty and forty-five, with black and piercing eyes, a pale complexion, a strongly-marked nose, and a black and well-cut moustache. He was dressed in a doublet and hose of a violet color, with shoulder-knots of the same, without any other ornaments than the customary slashes through which the shirt appeared.

Though new, they looked creased like travelling clothes for a long time packed up in a portmanteau. D'Artagnan made all these remarks with the rapidity of a most minute observer, and, doubtless, from an instinctive feeling that this unknown was destined to exert a great influence over his future life.

Now, as at the moment in which d'Artagnan fixed his eyes upon the gentleman in violet, the latter made one of his most knowing and profound remarks respecting the Béarnese pony, his two auditors laughed even more loudly than before, and he himself, though contrary to his custom, allowed a pale smile to stray over his countenance. This time there could be no doubt, d'Artagnan was really insulted. Full, then, of this conviction, he pulled his cap down over his eyes, and, endeavoring to copy some of the court airs he had picked up in Gascony among young travelling nobles, he advanced, with one hand on the hilt of his sword and the other leaning on his hip. Unfortunately, as he advanced, his anger blinded him more at every step, and, instead of the proper and lofty speech prepared as a prelude to his challenge, he found nothing at the tip of his tongue but a coarse personal slur, which he accompanied with a furious gesture.

"I say, sir, you, sir, hiding yourself behind that shutter!—yes, you, sir, tell me what you are laughing at, and we will carry out the joke together."

The gentleman withdrew his eyes slowly from the nag to his master, as if he required some time to ascertain whether it could be to him that such strange reproaches were addressed; then when he could not possibly entertain any doubt of the matter, his eyebrows slightly bent, and, with an accent of irony and insolence impossible to describe, replied to d'Artagnan:

"I am not speaking to you, sir!"

"But I am speaking to you!" replied the young man, additionally exasperated with this mixture of insolence and good manners, politeness and scorn.

The stranger looked at him again with a slight smile, and, retiring from the window, came out of the inn with a slow step,

and placed himself before the horse within two paces of d'Artagnan. His quiet manner and ironical countenance redoubled the mirth of the persons with whom he had been talking, and who still remained at the window.

D'Artagnan, seeing him approach, drew his sword a foot out of the scabbard.

"This horse feeds, or rather has fed in his youth, on buttercups," resumed the stranger, continuing the remarks he had begun to his auditors at the window, without paying the least attention to the exasperation of d'Artagnan, who, however had placed himself between him and them. "It is a color very well known in botany, but till the present time very rare among horses."

"There are people who laugh at a horse that would not dare to laugh at the master of it," cried the young emulator of Treville the duellist.

"I do not often laugh, sir," replied the unknown, "as you may perceive by my countenance; but, nevertheless, I retain the privilege of laughing when I please."

"And I," protested d'Artagnan, "will allow no man to laugh when it displeases me!"

"Indeed, sir," continued the other, calmer than ever,—"Then it strikes me that you will have rather a lively time of it." And turning on his heel, he was about to re-enter by the front gate, under which d'Artagnan, on arriving, had observed a saddled horse.

But d'Artagnan was not a character to allow a man to escape him thus, who had the insolence to laugh at him. He drew his sword entirely from the scabbard, and followed him, shouting:

"Turn, turn, Master Joker, unless you would have another thing strike you, and that, my sword—in your back."

"Strike me!" said the other turning round and surveying the young man with as much astonishment as contempt. "Why my boy, you must be mad!" Then, in a suppressed tone, as if speaking to himself: "This is annoying," continued he. "What a god-send this would be for his Majesty, who is seeking every where for madcaps to recruit his Musketeers!"

He had scarcely finished, when d'Artagnan made such a furious lunge at him, that if he had not sprung nimbly backward, he would have jested for the last time. Perceiving that the matter was beyond a joke, the stranger drew his sword, saluted his adversary, and placed himself on his guard. But at the same moment his two auditors, accompanied by the host, fell upon d'Artagnan with sticks, shovels, and tongs. This caused so rapid and complete a diversion to the attack, that d'Artagnan's adversary, whilst the latter turned round to face this shower of blows, sheathed his sword with the same precision, and from an actor, which he had nearly been, became a spectator of the fight, a part in which he acquitted himself with his usual impassibility, muttering, nevertheless:

"A plague upon these Gascons! Put him on his yellow horse again, and let him begone!"

"Not before I have killed you, poltroon!" cried d'Artagnan, making the best face possible, and never giving back one step before his three assailants, who continued to shower their blows upon him.

"Another gasconade!" murmured the gentleman. "By my honor, these Gascons are incorrigible! Keep up the dance, then, since he will have it so. When he is tired, he will, perhaps, tell us that he has enough of it."

But the unknown was not acquainted with the headstrong personage he had to do with; d'Artagnan was not the man ever to cry for quarter. The fight was, therefore, prolonged for some seconds; but at length d'Artagnan's sword was struck from his hand by the blow of a cudgel, and broken in two pieces. Another blow, full upon his forehead, at the same moment, brought him to the ground, covered with blood and almost fainting.

It was at this period that people came flocking to the scene of action from all parts. The host, fearful of consequences, with the help of his servant, carried the wounded man into the kitchen, where some trifling attention was bestowed upon him.

As to the gentleman, he resumed his place at the window, and surveyed the crowd with impatience, evidently annoyed by their remaining undispersed.

"Well, how is it with this madman?" exclaimed he, turning round as the opening door announced the entrance of the host, who came to inquire if he was unhurt.

"Your Excellency is safe and sound?" asked the host.

"Oh, yes! perfectly, my good host, but I wish to know what is become of our hotspur."

"He is cooler," said the host; "he fainted quite away, but before that, he collected all his strength to challenge you, and to defy you."

"Why, this fellow must be the devil in person!" cried the guest.

"Oh, no, your Excellency!" replied the host with a grin of contempt; "he is not the devil, for during his fainting we rummaged his valise, and found nothing but a clean shirt and twelve crowns, which, however, did not prevent his saying, as he was fainting, that if such a thing had happened in Paris you should have instantly repented of it, while here you would repent it later."

"Then," said the stranger, coldly, "he must be some prince in disguise."

"I have told you this, good sir," resumed the host, "in order that you may be on your guard."

"Did he name no one in his passion?"

"Yes! he slapped his pocket and said: 'We shall see what Captain de Treville will think of this insult offered to his ward!'"

"Treville?" said the unknown, becoming attentive; "he put his hand upon his pocket whilst pronouncing the name of Tré-

ville? Now, my dear host! whilst your youth was insensible, you did not fail, I am quite sure, to ascertain what that pocket contained. What was there in it?"

"A letter addressed to Captain Treville of the Musketeers."

The host, endowed with great perspicacity, did not observe the expression which his words had given to the physiognomy of the unknown, who rose from the front of the window, upon the sill of which he had leaned with his elbow, and knitted his brows like a man suddenly rendered uneasy.

"The devil!" murmured he, between his teeth. "Can Treville have set this Gascon upon me? He is very young, but a sword-thrust is a sword-thrust, whatever be the age of him who gives it, and a youth is less to be suspected than an older man; a weak obstacle is sometimes sufficient to overthrow a great design."

And he fell into a reverie which lasted some minutes.

"Host," said he, "could you not contrive to get rid of this frantic boy for me? In conscience, I cannot kill him; and yet," added he, with a coldly menacing expression, "and yet he is a burden to me. Where is he?"

"In my wife's chamber, where they are dressing his hurts, on the first floor."

"His things and his bag are with him? Has he taken off his doublet?"

"On the contrary, everything is in the kitchen. But if he annoys you, this young crazy fool—"

"To be sure he does. He caused a disturbance in your hostelry, which respectable people cannot put up with. Go, make out my bill, and call my servant."

"What, sir! do you mean to leave us already?"

"You know I was going, as I ordered you to get my horse saddled. Has not my desire been complied with?"

"Yes, sir; and as your Excellency may have observed, your horse is in the great gateway, ready saddled for your departure."

"That is well; do as I have directed you then."

"What the devil!" said the host to himself, "can he be afraid of this boy?" But an imperious glance from the unknown stopped him short; he bowed humbly, and retired.

"My-Lady must see nothing of this fellow," continued the stranger. "She will soon pass—she is late. I had better get on horseback, and go and meet her. I should like, however, to know what this letter addressed to Treville contains!"

And the unknown, muttering to himself, directed his steps towards the kitchen.

In the meantime, the host, who entertained no doubt that it was the presence of the young man that drove the unknown from his tavern reascended to his wife's chamber, and found d'Artagnan just recovering his senses. Giving him to understand that the police would deal with him pretty severely for having picked a quarrel with a great lord, for in the opinion of the host, the unknown could be nothing less, he insisted that, notwithstanding his weakness, he should get up and depart as quickly

as possible. D'Artagnan, half stupefied, without his doublet, and with his head bound up in a linen cloth, arose and urged forward by the host, began to descend the stairs; but on arriving at the kitchen, the first thing he saw was his antagonist, talking calmly, at the step of a heavy carriage, drawn by two large Norman horses.

His interlocutor, whose head appeared through the carriage window, was a woman of about twenty years of age. We have already observed with what rapidity d'Artagnan seized the expression of a countenance: he perceived then, at a glance, that this woman was young and beautiful; and her beauty struck him the more forcibly, from its being totally different from that of the southern countries in which d'Artagnan had hitherto resided. She was pale, a blonde, with long curls falling over her shoulders, large blue, languishing eyes, rosy lips, and hands of alabaster. She was talking with the stranger in liveliness.

"His Eminence, then, orders me——" said the lady.

"To return instantly to England, and to inform him immediately the duke leaves London."

"And my other instructions?" asked the fair traveller.

"They are contained in this box, which you will not open until on the other side of the Channel."

"Very well; and what are you doing to do?"

"I, oh! I shall return to Paris."

"What, without chastising this insolent little boy?" asked the lady.

The other was about to reply, but at the moment he opened his mouth, d'Artagnan, who had heard all, rushed forward through the open door.

"This insolent little boy chastises others," cried he, "and I have good hope that he whom he means to chastise will not escape him as he did before."

"Will not escape him?" replied the cavalier, knitting his brow.

"No, before a woman, you would not dare to fly, I presume?"

"Remember," said My-Lady, seeing the hand on the sword, "remember that the least delay may ruin everything."

"True," cried the gentleman; "begone, then, on your part, and I will depart as quickly on mine." And bowing to the lady, he sprang into his saddle, her coachman at the same time applying his whip vigorously to his horses. The two thus separated taking opposite directions, at full gallop.

"Your reckoning!" vociferated the host whose respect for the traveller was changed into profound contempt, on seeing him depart without settling his bill.

"Pay him, booby!" cried the gentleman to his servant, without checking the speed of his horse; and the man, after throwing two or three pieces of silver at the foot of mine host, galloped after his master.

"Coward! false gentleman!" yelled d'Artagnan, springing forward, in his turn, after the servant. But his wound had rendered him too weak to support such an exertion. Scarcely had he

gone a dozen steps when his ears began to tingle, a faintness seized him, a cloud of blood passed over his eyes, and he fell in the middle of the street, shouting still:

"Coward! coward! coward!"

"He is a coward indeed," grumbled the host, drawing near to d'Artagnan, and endeavoring by this little flattery to make up matters with the young man, as the hero of the fable did with the snail he had despised the evening before.

"Yes, a base coward," murmured d'Artagnan, "but she is very beautiful."

"What she?" demanded the host.

"My-Lady," faltered d'Artagnan, and fainted a second time.

"Ah; it's all one," said the host; "I have lost two customers, but this one remains, of whom I am pretty certain for some days to come; and that will be eleven crowns gained, at all events."

We must remember that eleven crowns was just the amount that was left in d'Artagnan's purse.

The host had reckoned upon eleven days of confinement at a crown a day, but he had reckoned without his guest. On the following morning at five o'clock, d'Artagnan arose, and descending to the kitchen, without help, asked, among other ingredients, the list of which has not come down to us, for oil, wine, and rosemary, and with his mother's recipe in hand, composed a balsam, with which he anointed his numerous wounds, replacing his bandages himself, and positively refusing the assistance of any doctor. Thanks, no doubt, to the efficacy of the gipsy balsam; and perhaps also, thanks to the absence of any doctor, d'Artagnan walked about that same evening, and was almost cured by the morrow.

But when the time came to pay for this rosemary, oil, and wine, the only expense the master incurred, as he had preserved a strict abstinence; while, on the contrary, the yellow horse, by the account of the hostler, at least, had eaten three times as much as a horse of his size could reasonably be supposed to do, d'Artagnan found nothing in his pocket but his little velvet purse with the eleven crowns it contained; the letter addressed to Treville had disappeared.

When he had come to the conviction that the letter was not to be found, he flew, for the third time, into such a rage as was near costing him a fresh consumption of wine, oil, and rosemary; for upon seeing this hot-headed youth become exasperated and threaten to destroy everything in the establishment if his letter were not found, the host seized a spit, his wife a broom-handle, and the servants the same sticks they had used the day before.

"My letter of recommendation!" bellowed d'Artagnan, "my letter of recommendation! or, 'sdeath! I will spit you all like so many ortolans!"

Unfortunately there was one powerful obstacle to the accomplishment of this threat; his sword had been, in his first conflict, broken in two, and hence it resulted, that when d'Artagnan pro-

ceeded to draw it, he found himself purely and simply armed with a stump of about eight or ten inches in length, which the host had carefully placed in the scabbard. As to the rest of the blade, the cook had slily put that on one side to make himself a larding pin.

But this deception would probably not have stopped our fiery gallant if the host had not reflected that the claim which his guest made was perfectly fair.

"Right," said he, lowering the point of the spit, "where is this letter?"

"Yes, where?" cried d'Artagnan. "In the first place, I warn you that that letter is for Captain de Treville, and it must be found; if not, quickly, he will know how to have it produced, I'll answer for it!"

This threat completed the intimidation of the host. After the King and the Cardinal, Treville's was the name most frequently repeated by the military, and even by citizens. There was, to be sure, Father Joseph, but his name was never pronounced but with a subdued voice, such was the terror inspired by his Gray Eminence, as the Cardinal's familiar was called.

Throwing down his spit, and ordering his wife to do the same with her broom-handle, and the servants with their sticks, he first set the example of commencing an earnest search for the lost letter.

"Does the letter contain anything valuable?" demanded the host, after a few minutes of useless investigation.

"'Sblood! I think it does, indeed," cried the Gascon, who reckoned upon this letter for making his way at court; "it contained my fortune!"

"Bills upon Spain?" asked the disturbed host.

"Bills upon his Majesty's private treasury," answered d'Artagnan, who, reckoning upon entering into the King's service in consequence of this recommendation, thought he could make this somewhat venturesome reply without telling a falsehood.

"The devil!" cried the host, in despair.

"But it's of no importance," continued d'Artagnan, with national assurance; "the money is nothing—that letter was everything; I would rather have lost a thousand pistoles than have lost it."—He would not have risked more if he had said twenty thousand; but juvenile modesty restrained him.

A ray of light all at once broke upon the mind of the host, as he was wishing himself at the devil upon finding nothing.

"That letter is not lost!" cried he; "it has been stolen from you, and by the gentleman here yesterday. He came down into the kitchen, where your doublet was. He remained there some time alone. I would lay a wager he has stolen it."

"Do you think so?" answered d'Artagnan, but little convinced, as he knew better than any one else how entirely personal the value of this letter was, and likely to tempt the cupidity of no one. The fact was none of the servants, or the travellers could have gained by being possessed of this paper.

"Do you say,'" resumed d'Artagnan, "that you suspect that impertinent gentleman?"

"I tell you I am sure of it," continued the host; "when I informed him that your lordship was the ward of Captain Treville and that you even had a letter for that illustrious gentleman, he appeared to be very much disturbed, and asked me where that letter was, and immediately ran down into the kitchen, where he knew your doublet was."

"Then that's the man that has robbed me," replied d'Artagnan: "I will complain to Captain de Treville, who will complain to the King." He then drew two crowns majestically from his purse, gave them to the host, who accompanied him cap in hand to the gate, remounted his yellow horse, which bore him without any further accident to the gate of St. Antoine at Paris, where his owner sold him for three crowns, which was a very good price, considering that d'Artagnan had ridden him hard from Meung. Thus the dealer to whom d'Artagnan sold him for the said nine livres did not conceal from the young man, that he only gave that enormous sum for him on account of the novel color.

Thus d'Artagnan entered Paris on foot, carrying his little packet under his arm, and walked about till he found an apartment to be let on terms suited to the scantiness of his means. This was a garret, in the Rue des Fossoyeurs, near the Luxembourg Palace.

As soon as the earnest-penny was paid, d'Artagnan took possession of his lodging, and passed the remainder of the day in sewing on to his doublet and hose some ornamental braiding which his mother had taken off from an almost new doublet of M. d'Artagnan's the elder, and given to him secretly; next he went to the swordsmith's, to have a new blade put to his sword, and then returned towards the Louvre Palace, inquiring of the first Musketeer he met for Treville House which proved to be in the Rue du Vieux-Colombier, in the immediate vicinity of the chamber hired by d'Artagnan; a circumstance which appeared to furnish a happy augury for the success of his journey.

After which, satisfied with the way in which he had conducted himself at Meung, without remorse for the past, confident in the present, and full of hope for the future, he retired to bed, and slept the sleep of the brave.

This sleep, still rustic, brought him to nine o'clock in the morning, at which hour he rose in order to repair to the residence of M. de Treville the third personage in the kingdom in paternal estimation.

CHAPTER II.

THE ANTECHAMBER OF THE MUSKETEER CAPTAIN.

M. de Troisville, as his family was still called in Gascony, or M. de Treville, as he had ended by styling himself in Paris, had

really commenced life like d'Artagnan, without a penny in his pocket, but with that fund of courage, shrewdness, and intelligence, making the poorest Gascon gentleman often derive more in his hope from the paternal inheritance than the richest Perigordian or Berrichon gentleman in reality from his. His steady bravery, his still more steady success at a time when blows poured down like hail, had borne him to the top of that ladder called court favor, which he had climbed four steps at a time.

He was the friend of the King, who honored highly, as every one knows, the memory of his father, Henry IV. The father of Treville had served him so faithfully in his wars against the League, that for want of money—a thing to which the Béarnais was accustomed all his life, and who constantly paid his debts with that of which he never stood in need of borrowing, that is to say, with ready wit—for want of money, we repeat, he authorized him, after the reduction of Paris, to assume for his arms a golden lion passant upon gules, with the device of: *Fidelis et fortis.* This was a great matter in the way of honor, but very little in the way of wealth; so that when the illustrious companion of the great Henry died, the only inheritance he was able to leave his son was his sword and his advice. Thanks to this double gift and the spotless name that accompanied them, Treville was admitted into the household of the young prince, where he made such good use of his sword, and was so faithful to his device, that Louis XIII., one of the good blades of his kingdom, was accustomed to say that, if he had a friend who was about to fight, he would advise him to choose as a second, himself first, and Treville next, or even, perhaps before him.

Thus Louis XIII. had a real liking for Treville, a royal liking, a selfish liking, it is true, but still a liking. At that unhappy period it was an important consideration to be surrounded by such men as de Treville. Many might take for their device the epithet of *strong,* which formed the second part of his motto, but very few gentlemen could lay claim to the faithful, which constituted the first. Treville was one of these latter; rare organization endowed with an obedient intelligence like the dogs; with a blind valor, a quick eye, and a prompt hand, to whom sight appeared only to be given to see if the king were dissatisfied with any one, and with the hand to strike this displeasing body. In short, up to this period, nothing had been wanting to Treville but opportunity; but he was ever on the watch for it, and promised himself that he would never fail to seize it by its three hairs whenever it came within reach. Louis XIII. then made Treville Captain of his Musketeers, who were to Louis XIII., in devotedness, or rather in fanaticism, what his ordinaries had been to Henry III., and his Scotch Archers to Louis XI.

On his part, in this respect, the Cardinal was not behind-hand with the King. When he saw the formidable corps of picked fighters by which Louis XIII. surrounded himself this second or rather this first king of France, became desirous that he too should have his guard. He had his Musketeers then, as Louis

XIII. had his, and these two powerful rivals vied each other in procuring the most celebrated swordsmen, not only from all the provinces of France, but even from all foreign states. It was not uncommon for Richelieu and Louis XIII. to dispute over their evening game of chess, upon the merits of their servants. Each boasted the bearing and the courage of his own defenders, and whilst exclaiming loudly against duels and broils, they excited them secretly to quarrel, deriving an immoderate satisfaction or a true sorrow at the success or defeat of their own combatants.

Treville had seized on the weak side of his master, and it was to this address that he owed the long and constant favor of a king who had not left the reputation behind him of having been very faithful in his friendships. He paraded his Musketeers before the Cardinal Armand Duplessis with an insolent air, which made the grey moustache of his Eminence curl with ire. Treville was a master of the war of that period, in which he who did not live at the expense of the enemy, live at the expense of his compatriots: his soldiers formed a legion of devil-may-care fellows, perfectly undisciplined as regarded every one but himself.

Loose, hard-drinking, rakehelly, the King's Musketeers, or rather Treville's, spread themselves about in the wine-saloons, in the public walks, and the public sports, shouting, twisting their moustaches, clanking their swords, and taking great pleasure in annoying the guards of the Cardinal whenever met; then drawing steel in the open streets; with jests; sometimes killed, but sure in that case to be both mourned and avenged; often killing others, but then certain of not rotting in prison, Treville being there to claim them. Thus Treville was praised to the highest note by these men, who adored him, and who, bullies as they were, trembled before him like scholars before their master, obedient to his least word, and ready to die, to wash out the least blame.

Treville employed this powerful machine for the King in the first place, and the friends of the king—and then for himself and his own friends. For the rest, in no instance we are told, was this worthy gentleman accused of deriving personal advantage from the co-operation of his minions. Endowed with a rare genius for intrigue, which rendered him the equal of the ablest, he remained an honest man. Still further, in spite of sword-thrusts which weaken, and painful exercises which fatigue, he had become one of the most gallant of gallants, most insinuating squires of games, the softest whisperer of interesting nothings of his day; Treville's "flames" were talked of as those of Bassompierre, twenty years before, and that was not saying a little. The Captain of the Musketeers then was admired, feared and loved, which constitutes the apogee of human fortunes.

Louis XIV. absorbed all the smaller stars of his court in his own vast radiance; but his father a sun *pluribus impar,* left his personal splendor to each of his favorites, his individual value to each of his courtiers. In addition to the king's and the Cardinal's morning receptions, there might be reckoned in Paris at

that time more than two hundred lesser ones, each, in its degree attended. Among these two hundred, Treville's was one of the most thronged.

His mansion courtyard, in the Rue du Vieux-Columbier, resembled a camp, by six o'clock in the morning in summer and eight in winter. From fifty to sixty Musketeers, who appeared to relieve each other in order always to present an imposing number, paraded constantly about, armed to the teeth and ready for anything. On one of those immense staircases, upon whose space modern civilization would build a whole house, ascended and descended the genteel beggars in search of favors of any kind: gentlemen from the provinces anxious to be enrolled, and servants in all sorts of liveries, bringing and carrying messages between their masters and M. de Treville. In the antechamber, upon long circular benches reposed the invited. In this apartment a buzz prevailed from morning till night, whilst Treville in his closet contiguous, received visits, listened to complaints, gave his orders, and, like the King in his balcony at the Louvre, had only to place himself at the window to review both men and armies.

The day on which d'Artagnan presented himself, the assemblage was imposing, particularly for a rural squire; it is true that this rural was a Gascon and particularly at this period, d'Artagnan's fellow-countrymen had the reputation of not being easily intimidated. When he once passed the missive door, studded with long square-headed nails, he fell into the midst of a troop of men of the sword, who crossed each other's passage, called out, quarrelled and played tricks. None could make way through these turbulent and conflicting waves, save an officer, a great noble, or a pretty woman.

Into the midst of this tumult and disorder our adventurer advanced with a beating heart, ranging his long rapier up his lanky leg, and keeping one hand on the edge of his felt hat, with that rustic smile which affects confidence. When he had passed one group he began to breathe more freely; but he could not help observing that they turned round to look at him, and, for the first time in his life, d'Artagnan, who had till that day entertained a very good opinion of himself, felt ridiculous.

When he arrived at the staircase it was still worse; there were four Musketeers on the bottom steps amusing themselves with the following exercise, whilst ten or twelve of their comrades waited upon the landing-place their turns to take their places in the sport.

One of them, placed on the top stair, naked sword in hand, prevented, or at least endeavored to prevent, the three others from going up. These three others fenced against him with their nimble swords, which d'Artagnan at first took for foils, buttoned; but he soon perceived by the scratches that every weapon was pointed and sharpened and that at each of these scratches not only the spectators but even the actors themselves laughed like so many madmen.

He who at that moment occupied the upper step kept his adversaries in check admirably. A circle was formed around them; the conditions required that at every hit the person hit should quit the game, losing his turn of audience to the advantage of the person who had "touched." In five minutes three were slightly wounded, one on the hand, another on the chin, and the third on the ear by the defender of the stair, who himself remained intact: a feat of skill which was worth to him according to agreement, three turns of favor.

However difficult it might be, or rather as he pretended it was, to impress our young traveller, this pastime really astonished him; he had seen in his province—where heads become so easily heated, more preliminaries to duels, but the freaks of these four fencers appeared to him the strongest he had ever heard, even in Gascony. He believed himself transported into that famous country of giants into which Gulliver since went and was so frightened; and yet he had not gained the goal, for there were still the landing place and the antechamber.

On the landing they were no longer fighting, but telling stories about women, and in the antechamber stories about the court. On the landing, d'Artagnan blushed; in the antechamber, he trembled. His warm and fickle imagination, which in Gascony had rendered him formidable to young chambermaids, and even sometimes to their mistresses, had never dreamt, even in moments of delirium, of half the amorous wonders, or a quarter of the feats of gallantry, here set forth, enframing names the best known, and with details the least delicate. But if his morals were shocked on the landing, his respect for the Cardinal was scandalized in the antechamber. Here to his great astonishment, d'Artagnan heard the policy which made all Europe tremble, criticized aloud and openly, as well as the private life of the Cardinal, which had brought about the punishment of so many great nobles for having tried to pry into; that great man, who was so revered by d'Artagnan the elder, served as an object of ridicule to the Musketeers, who cracked their jokes upon his bandy legs and his hump-back; some sang ballads upon Madame Aiguillon, his mistress, and Madame Combalet, his niece; whilst others formed parties and plans to annoy the pages and guards of the Cardinal-Duke—all things which appeared to d'Artagnan monstrous impossibilities.

Nevertheless when the name of the King was now and then uttered unthinkingly amidst all these Cardinal jokes a sort of gag seemed to close for a moment all these jeering mouths; they looked hesitatingly around them, and then appeared to doubt the thickness of the partition between them and the closet; but a fresh allusion soon brought back the conversation to his Eminence, and then the laughter recovered its loudness, and no light was spared upon any of his actions.

"Certes, these fellows will all be either shut up or hung," thought the terrified d'Artagnan, "and I, no doubt, with them, for from the moment I have either listened to or heard them,

I shall be held an accomplice. What would my good father say, who so strongly pointed out to me the respect due the Cardinal, if he knew I was in the society of such pagans?"

We have no need therefore, to say that d'Artagnan did not venture to join in the conversation; only he looked with all his eyes and listened with all his ears, stretching his five senses so as to lose nothing; and, in spite of his confidence in the paternal monitions, he felt himself carried by his tastes and led by his instincts to praise rather than to blame the unheard-of things passing before him.

D'Artagnan being, however, a perfect stranger in the crowd of courtiers, and this his first appearance, a valet came to him and asked him his business there. At this demand, d'Artagnan gave his name very modestly, laid a stress upon the title of compatriot, and begged the servant to request a moment's audience of Captain de Treville—a request which the other, with an air of patronage, promised to convey in time and season.

D'Artagnan, a little recovered from his first surprise, had now leisure to study costumes and countenances.

The centre of the most animated group was a Musketeer of great height, of a haughty countenance, and dressed in a costume so peculiar as to attract general attention. He did not wear the uniform cloak—which, indeed at that time, less of liberty than of seemingly independence, was not obligatory—but a cerulean blue doublet, a little faded and worn, and over this a magnificent baldrick worked in gold, which shone like water-ripples in the sun. A long cloak of crimson velvet fell in graceful folds from his shoulders, disclosing in the front the splendid baldrick, from which was suspended a gigantic rapier.

This Musketeer had just come off guard, complained of having a cold, and coughed from time to time affectedly.

It was for this reason, he said to those around him, he had put on his cloak, and whilst he spoke with a lofty air, and loftily twisted his moustache, all admired his embroidered baldrick and d'Artagnan more than any one.

"What do you make a wonder about?" said the Musketeer; "the fashion is coming in; it is a folly, I admit, but still it is the fashion. Besides, one must lay out one's inheritance somehow."

"Ah, *Porthos*" cried one of his companions, "don't think to palm upon us that you obtained that baldrick by paternal generosity: it was given to you by that veiled lady I met you with the other Sunday, near the Saint-Honore gate."

"No, upon honor; by the faith of a gentleman, I bought it with my own savings," answered he whom they designated under the name of "Porthos."

"Yes, about in the same manner," said another Musketeer, "as I bought this new purse with the money my mistress put into the old one."

"It's true though," said Porthos; "and the proof is, that I paid twelve pistoles for it."

The wonder was increased, though the doubt continued to exist.

"Is it not true, *Aramis?*" said Porthos, turning towards another Musketeer.

This one formed a perfect contrast with his interrogator; Aramis was a young man, of about two or three and twenty, with an open, ingenuous countenance, a mild black eye, and cheeks rosy and downy as an autumn peach; his delicate moustache marked a perfectly straight line upon his upper lip: he appeared to dread to lower his hands lest their veins should swell, and he pinched the tops of his ears from time to time to preserve their delicate pink transparency. Habitually he spoke little and slowly, bowed frequently, laughed without noise, showing his teeth, which were fine, and of which, as of the rest of his person, he appeared to take great care. He answered the appeal of his friend by an affirmative nod.

This appeared to dispel all doubts with regard to the baldrick; they continued to admire it, but said no more about it; and, with one of the rapid changes of thought, the conversation passed suddenly to another subject.

"What do you think of the story of Chalais' squire relates?" asked another, without addressing any one in particular.

"And what does he say," asked Porthos, in a self-sufficient one.

"He relates that he met at Brussels, Rochefort, the Cardinal's other self, disguised as a Capuchin; and that this cursed Rochefort, thanks to his disguise, had tricked M. de Laigues, like a simpleton as he is."

"A simpleton, indeed!" said Porthos; "but is the matter certain?"

"I had it from Aramis," replied the Musketeer.

"Indeed?"

"Why, you know it, Porthos," said Aramis; "I told you of it yesterday—say nothing more about it."

"Say nothing more about it—that's your opinion!" replied Porthos. "Say nothing more about it! Plague you, come to your conclusions quickly. What! the Cardinal sets a spy upon a gentleman, has his letters stolen from him by means of a traitor, a brigand, a rascal—has, with the help of this spy, and thanks to this correspondence, has Chalais' head cut off, under the stupid pretext that he wanted to kill the King, and have the King's brother marry his widow!

"Nobody knew a word of this enigma. You unravelled it yesterday, to the great satisfaction of all; and while we are still gaping with wonder at the news, you come and tell us to-day—'Let us say no more about it.'"

"Well, then, let us speak about it, since you desire it," replied Aramis, patiently.

"Hang Rochefort," cried Porthos, "if I were poor Chalais' squire, he should pass a minute or two very uncomfortably with me."

"Then you—you would pass rather a sad half-hour with the Bloody-Red Duke," replied Aramis.

"Oh! bravo! the Bloody-Red Duke!" cried Porthos, clapping his hands and nodding. "That is capital. I'll circulate that saying, be assured, my dear fellow. Who says our Aramis is not a wit? What a misfortune it is you did not follow your first vocation—what a delightful priest you would have made!"

"Oh, it's only a temporary postponement," replied Aramis; "I shall be one, some day. You very well know, Porthos, that I continue to study theology for that purpose."

"He will do it, as he says," roared Porthos; "he will be one, sooner or later."

"Soon," said Aramis.

"He only waits one thing to determine him to resume his cassock, which hangs behind his uniform," said another.

"What is he waiting for?" asked his neighbor.

"Only till the Queen has given us an heir to the crown of France."

"No jokes upon that subject, gentlemen," said Porthos; "thank God, the Queen is still young enough."

"They say that Lord Buckingham is in France," replied Aramis, with a significant smile, which gave to this sentence, apparently so simple, a tolerably scandalous meaning.

"Aramis, my friend, this time you are wrong," interrupted Porthos, "your wit is always leading you astray; if the captain heard that you would repent of speaking thus."

"Are you going to teach me better, Porthos," cried Aramis, over whose usually mild eye a flash passed like lightning.

"My dear fellow, be a Musketeer or a priest, but not both," replied Porthos. "You know what Athos told you the other day: you eat at everybody's mess. Ah! don't be angry, I beg of you, that would be useless; you know what is agreed upon between you, Athos, and me. You go to Mme. d'Aigiullon's and you pay your court to her; you go to Mme. de Bois-Tracy's, the cousin of the Duchess de Chevreuse, and you pass for being far advanced in the good graces of that lady. Oh, good Lord! don't trouble yourself to reveal your successes; no one asks for your secret—all the world knows your discretion. But since you possess that virtue, why the devil don't you make use of it with respect to her Majesty? Let whoever likes talk of the King and the Cardinal, and how he likes; but the Queen is sacred, and if any one speaks of her, let it be in praise."

"Porthos, you are as vain as Narcissus, I tell you so," replied Aramis; "you know I hate moralizing, except when it is preached by Athos. As to you, dear fellow, you wear too magnificent a baldrick to be strong on that head. I will be a priest if it suits me; in the meanwhile I am a Musketeer: in that quality I say what I please, and at this moment it pleases me to say that you irritate me."

"Gentlemen! gentlemen!" cried the surrounding group.

"M. de Treville awaits M. d'Artagnan," called out a servant, throwing open the door of the cabinet.

At this announcement, during which the door remained open, every one became mute, and amidst the general silence the young man crossed the antechamber, and entered the Captain's room, congratulating himself with all his heart at having so narrowly escaped the end of this strange quarrel.

CHAPTER III.

THE AUDIENCE.

Treville was at the moment in rather an ill-humor; nevertheless, he saluted the young man politely, who bowed to the very ground, and he smiled on receiving his compliment, the Béarnese accent of which recalled to him at the same time his youth and his country, a double remembrance, which makes a man smile at all ages. But stepping towards the antechamber, and making a sign to d'Artagnan with his hand, as if to ask his permission to finish with others before he began with him, he called three times, with a louder voice at each time, so that he went through all the tones between the imperative accent and the angry accent.

"Athos! Porthos! Aramis!"

The two Musketeers, with whom we have already made acquaintance, and who answered to the last two of these three names, immediately quitted the group of which they formed a part, and advanced towards the cabinet, the door of which closed after them as soon as they had entered. Their appearance, although it was not quite at ease, excited by its carelessness, at once full of dignity and submission, the admiration of d'Artagnan, who beheld in these two men demi-gods, and in their leader an Olympian Jupiter, armed with all his thunder.

When the two had entered, and the door was closed behind them, the buzzing murmur of the antechamber, to which the summons which had been made had doubtless furnished fresh aliment, recommenced; after Treville had three or four times paced in silence, and with a frowning brow, the whole length of his cabinet, passing each time before Porthos and Aramis, who were as upright and silent as if on parade, he stopped all at once full in front of them, and covering them from head to foot with an angry look thundered:

"Do you know what the King said to me, no longer ago than yesterday evening, gentlemen?"

"No," replied the two, after a moment's silence—"no, Captain, we do not."

"But I hope that you will do us the honour to tell us," added Aramis, in his politest tone, and with his most graceful bow.

"He told me that he should henceforth recruit his Musketeers from among the Cardinal's guards."

"The Cardinal's guards, and why so?" asked Porthos, warmly.

"Because the King sees plainly that his small beer needs the strengthening infusion of some strong spirits."

The two soldiers colored up to the eyes. D'Artagnan did not know where he was, and wished to be a hundred feet under ground.

"Yes, yes," continued the Commander, growing warmer, "and his Majesty was right, for, upon my honor, it is true that the Musketeers cut but a miserable figure at court. The Cardinal related yesterday, whilst playing cards with the King, with condolence very displeasing to me, that the day before yesterday those fiery Musketeers, those dare-devils—he dwelt upon those words with an ironical tone still more displeasing to me—those braggarts, added he, glancing at me with his tiger-cat's eye, had stayed after closing hours in a drinking den of the Rue Forou, where a patrol of his guards were obliged to take them into custody.—He almost laughed in my very face, mind you—for kicking up a riot. The blue death seize me! you ought to know something about this. Take Musketeers into custody like cloak-snatchers! You were among them—you were! Don't deny it; you were recognized, for the Cardinal named you. But it's all my fault! because it is myself who select my men. You, now, Aramis, why the devil did you ask me for a uniform, when you would have been so much better in a cassock? And you, Porthos, do you only wear such a fine golden baldrick to suspend a sword of straw from it? And Athos—I don't see Athos! Where is he?"

"Sir," replied Aramis, in a sorrowful tone, "he is very ill, very ill!"

"Ill—very ill, say you? And what is his malady?"

"It is feared that it is the measles, sir," replied Porthos, desirous of getting a word in the conversation; "and, what is worse, it certainly spoils his complexion."

"The measles! That's a pretty proud story to tell me, Porthos! Sick at his age! No, no; wounded; without doubt—perhaps killed. Ah, if I knew! 'Sblood! I will not have this haunting of bad places, this quarrelling in the streets, this sword-play in cross-ways; and, above all, I will not have occasion given for the Cardinal's guards, brave, quiet, skillful men, who never put themselves in a position to be arrested, and who, besides, never allow themselves to be arrested, to laugh at you! I am sure of it—they would prefer dying on the spot to being arrested, or to yielding a step. To save yourselves, to scamper away—to flee! a pretty thing to be said of the King's Musketeers!"

Porthos and Aramis trembled with rage: they could willingly have strangled the speaker, if, at the bottom, they had not felt it was the great love he bore them which made him speak thus. They stamped upon the carpet, they bit their lips till the blood sprang, and grasped their sword hilts with all their strength. Without, all had heard, as we have said, Athos, Porthos, and Aramis called, and had guessed from Treville's tone of voice that he was very angry about something. A dozen curious heads

were glued to the tapestry, and became pale with fury; for their ears, closely applied to the door, did not lose a syllable of what was said, whilst their mouths repeated, as their leader went on, his insulting expressions to the whole population of the antechamber. In an instant, from the door of the cabinet to the street-gate, the whole mansion was in a state of commotion.

"Ah! the King's Musketeers are arrested by the Cardinal's guards, are they!" continued Treville, as furious within as his soldiers; but emphasizing his words, and plunging them, one by one, so to say, like so many blows of a stiletto, into the bosooms of his auditors. "What! six of his Eminence's guards arrest six of his Majesty's Musketeers! 'Sdeath! my part is taken! I will go straight to the Louvre; I will give in my resignation as Captain of the Royal Musketeers, to beg a lieutenancy in the Cardinal's guards; and if he refuses me, zounds! I will turn monk!"

At these words, the murmur without became an explosion; nothing was to be heard but oaths, crossing each other in the air. D'Artagnan looked round for tapestry behind which he might hide himself, and felt unbounded inclination to crawl under the table.

"Well, Captain," said Porthos, quite beside himself, "the truth is, that we were six against six; but we were set upon unawares; and before we had time to draw two of our party fell dead; and Athos, grievously wounded, was very little better. For you know Athos—Well, Captain, he endeavored twice to get up, and fell again twice. And we did not surrender—no! they dragged us away by force. On the way we escaped. As for Athos, they believed him to be dead, and left him very quietly on the field of battle, not thinking it worth the trouble to carry him away. Now, that's the whole story. What the devil, Captain, one cannot win all one's battles! Pompey the Great lost Pharsalia; and Francis the First, who was as I have heard say as good as other heroes, nevertheless lost the battle of Pavia."

"And I have the honor of assuring you, that I killed one of them with his own sword," said Aramis, "for mine was broken at the first parry. Killed him, or poniarded him, sir, as you like it."

"I did not know that," replied Treville, in a somewhat softened tone. "The Cardinal exaggerated, as I perceive."

"But pray, sir," continued Aramis, who, seeing his Captain become appeased, ventured to risk a plea—"pray, sir, do not say that Athos is wounded; he would be in despair if that should come to the ears of the King; and as the wound is very serious, seeing that after traversing the shoulder it penetrates into the chest, it is to be feared——"

At this instant the tapestry was raised, and a noble and handsome head, but frightfully pale, appeared under the fringe.

"Athos!" exclaimed the two.

"Athos!" repeated Treville to himself.

"You have sent for me, sir," said Athos to his Commander,

in a feeble yet perfectly calm voice—"as my comrades inform me, and I have hastened to receive your orders. I am here, what do you want with me?"

And at these words the Musketeer, in irreproachable costume, belted tightly as usual, with a tolerably firm step, entered the cabinet. Moved to the bottom of his heart by this proof of fortitude, Treville sprang towards him.

"I was about to say to these gentlemen," added he, "that I forbid my Musketeers to expose their lives needlessly; for brave men are very dear to the King, who knows that his guards are the bravest fellows on earth. Your hand, Athos!"

And without waiting for the answer to this proof of affection, Treville seized his right hand, and pressed it with all his might, not perceiving that Athos whatever might be his self-command, allowed a slight start in pain to escape him, and, if possible, grew paler than he was before.

The door had remained open, so strong was the excitement produced by the arrival of Athos, whose wound, though kept as secret as possible, was known to all. A burst of satisfaction hailed the last words of the captain; and two or three heads, carried away by the enthusiasm of the moment, appeared through the openings of the tapestry. Treville was about to reprehend this infraction of etiquette, when he felt the hand stiffen within his, and, upon turning his eyes towards him, perceived Athos was about to faint. At the same instant Athos, who had rallied all his energies to contend against pain, at length overcome by it, fell upon the floor as if dead.

"A surgeon!" cried Treville, "mine! the King's! the best that can be found!—a surgeon! or, 'Sblood! my brave Athos will die!"

At the call, the whole crowd rushed into the cabinet without thinking of shutting the door, and all clustered round the wounded man. But all this eager attention might have been useless, if the doctor so loudly called for had not chanced to be in the house. He pushed through the crowd, approached Athos, still insensible, and, as all this noise and commotion inconvenienced him greatly, he required, as the first and most urgent thing, that his patient should be carried into another chamber. Immediately Treville opened a door, and pointed the way to Porthos and Aramis, who bore their comrade in their arms. Behind this group walked the surgeon, and, as he passed through, the door closed.

The cabinet, generally held so sacred, became in an instant the annex of the antechamber. Everyone spoke, harangued, and vociferated, swearing, cursing, and consigning the Cardinal and his guards to all the devils.

An instant after, Porthos and Aramis re-entered, the surgeon and Captain Treville alone remaining with the wounded man.

At length Treville himself returned. Athos had recovered his senses; the surgeon declared that his state had nothing in it to

render his friends uneasy, his weakness having been purely and simply caused by loss of blood.

Then Treville waved his hand, and all retired except d'Artagnan, who did not forget that he had an audience, and, with his racial tenacity remained in his place.

When all had gone out, and the door was closed, Treville, on turning round, found himself alone with the young man. The stirring event which had just passed had in some degree broken the thread of his ideas. He inquired what was the will of his persevering visitor. D'Artagnan then repeated his name, and in an instant, recovering all his remembrances, M. de Treville was in possession of the current circumstances.

"Pardon me," said he, smiling, "pardon me, my dear compatriot, but I had perfectly forgotten you. But what else could happen? A captain is nothing but a father of a family, charged with even a greater responsibility than the father of an ordinary family. Soldiers are great boys; but as I maintain that the orders of the King, and more particularly the orders of the Cardinal, should be executed——"

D'Artagnan could not restrain a smile. By this smile, Treville judged that he had not to deal with a fool, and changing the subject, came straight to the point.

"I liked your father very much," said he. "What can I do for the son? Tell me quickly, my time is not my own."

"Captain," said d'Artagnan, "on quitting Tarbes, and coming hither, it was my intention to request of you, in remembrance of the friendship which you have not forgotten, the uniform of a Musketeer; but after all that I have seen, during the last two hours, I have become aware of the value if such a favor, and tremble lest I should not merit it."

"Well, young man," replied Treville, "it is, in fact, a favor, but it may not be so far beyond your hopes as you believe, or rather as you appear to believe; but his majesty's decision is always necessary: and I inform you with regret, that no one becomes a Musketeer without the preliminary ordeal of several campaigns, markedly brilliant deeds, or a service of two years in some regiment of less reputation than ours."

D'Artagnan bowed without replying, feeling his desire to don the uniform vastly increased by the difficulties which he learnt preceded the attainment of it.

"But," continued M. de Treville, fixing upon his fellow countryman a look so piercing, that it might be said he wished to read the thoughts of his heart; "but, on account of my old comrade, your father, as I have said, I will do something for you, young man. Our cadets from Béarn are not generally very rich, and I have no reason to think matters have much changed in this respect since I left the province. I dare say you have not brought too large a stock of money with you?"

D'Artagnan drew himself up with a proud air that plainly said, "I beg of no man."

"Oh! that's all very fine, young man," continued Treville,

"I am well acquainted with those airs; I myself came to Paris with four crowns in my purse, and would have fought with any one who dared to tell me I was not able to purchase the palace."

D'Artagnan's carriage became still more imposing; thanks to the sale of his horse, he commenced his career with four crowns more than Treville had possessed at the commencement of his.

"You ought, I say, then, to husband the means you have, however large the sum may be; but you ought also to endeavor to perfect yourself in the exercises becoming a gentleman. I will write a letter to-day to the director of the Royal Academy, and to-morrow he will admit you without any expense to yourself. Do not refuse this little service. Our best born and richest gentlemen sometimes solicit it, without being able to obtain it. You will learn riding, swordsmanship, and dancing; you will make desirable acquaintances, and from time to time you can call upon me, just to tell me how you are going on, and to say whether I can be of further service to you."

D'Artagnan, stranger as he was to court manners, could not but perceive a little coldness in this reception.

"Alas! sir," said he, "I cannot but perceive how sadly I miss the letter of introduction which my father gave me to present to you."

"I certainly am surprised," replied Treville, "that you should undertake so long a journey without that necessary *viaticum*, the only resource of us poor Béarnese."

"I had one, sir, and, thank God, in good terms, but it was perfidiously stolen from me."

He then related the adventure at Meung, described the strange gentleman with the greatest minuteness, and all with a warmth and truthfulness that delighted.

"This is all very strange," said Treville, after meditating a minute; "you mentioned my name, then, aloud?"

"Yes, sir, I certainly committed that imprudence; but why should I have done otherwise? A name like yours should be as a buckler to me on my way. Why not avail myself of it?"

Flattery was at that period very current, and Treville loved incense as well as a king, or even a cardinal. He could not refrain from a smile of visible satisfaction, but this smile soon disappeared; and returning to the adventure of Meung, he continued:

"Tell me, had not this gentleman a slight scar on his cheek?"

"Yes, such a one as would be made by the grazing of a bullet."

"Was he not a fine-looking man. Of lofty stature, pale complexion and brown hair?"

"Yes, yes, that is he; how is it, sir, that you are acquainted with this man? If ever I should meet him again, and I will find him, I swear, were it in hell——"

"He was waiting for a woman," continued Treville.

"He, at least, departed immediately after having conversed for a minute with a lady for whom he appeared to have been waiting."

"You did not gather the subject of their discourse?"

"He gave her a box; told her that it contained her instructions, and advised her not to open it before she arrived in London."

"Was this woman English?"

"He called her My-Lady."

"It is he!" muttered Treville; "I thought he was still at Brussels!"

"Oh! sir; if you know who and what this man is," cried d'Artagnan, "tell me who he is, and where he is. I will then release you from all your promises—even that of procuring my admission into the Musketeers; for, before everything, I long to revenge myself."

"Beware, young man!" cried Treville; "if you see him coming on one side of the street, pass by on the other! Do not run against such a rock; he would break you like glass."

"That will not prevent me," replied d'Artagnan, "if ever I should happen to meet with him——"

"In the meantime, if you will take my advice, you will not seek him," said Treville.

All at once, the Captain stopped, as if struck by a sudden suspicion. This great hatred which the young traveller manifested so loudly for this man, who—a rather improbable thing—had stolen his father's letter from him!—Was there not some perfidy concealed under this hatred?—might not this young man be sent by his Eminence?—might he not have come for the purpose of laying a snare for him?—this pretended d'Artagnan! was he not an emissary of the Cardinal's whom he sought to introduce into his house, to place near him, and win his confidence, and afterwards bring about his ruin, as had been practised in a thousand other instances? He fixed his eyes upon d'Artagnan, even more earnestly than before. He was but moderately reassured by that countenance, full of shrewd intelligence and affected humility.

"I know he is a Gascon," reflected he; "but he may be one for the Cardinal as well as for me. Let us try him.—"My friend," said he, slowly, "I wish, as the son of an ancient friend—for I consider this story of the lost letter perfectly true—I wish, I say, in order to repair the coldness you may have remarked in my reception of you, to make you acquainted with the secrets of our policy.—The King and the Cardinal are the best of friends; their apparent bickerings are only feints to deceive fools. I am not willing that my brother from Béarn, a handsome cavalier, a brave youth, quite fit to make his way, should become the dupe of all these artifices, and fall into the snare, and after the example of so many others, ruined by it. Be assured that I am devoted to both these all-powerful masters, and that my earnest endeavors have no other end than the service of the King and the Cardinal, one of the most illustrious geniuses that France has ever produced.

"Now, young man, regulate your conduct accordingly; and if you entertain, whether from your family, your relations, or even

from your instincts, any of these enmities which we see constantly breaking out against the Cardinal, bid me farewell, and let us separate. I will aid you in many ways, but without attaching you to my person. I hope that my frankness, at least, will make you my friend; for you are the only young man to whom I have hitherto spoken as I have done to you."

Treville said to himself:

"If the Cardinal has set this young fox upon me, he will certainly not have failed, knowing how bitterly I execrate him, to tell his spy that the best means of making his court to me is to rail at him; therefore in spite of all my protestations, if it be as I suspect, my cunning gossip here will launch out in abuse of his Eminence."

"It, however, proved otherwise," d'Artagnan answered, with the greatest simplicity:

"I am come to Paris with exactly such intentions, sir. My father advised me to bow to nobody but the King, the Cardinal, and you—whom he considered the three first personages in France."

D'Artagnan added Treville to the others, as may be perceived; but he thought this adjunct would do no harm.

"I hold, therefore, the Cardinal in the greatest veneration," continued he; "and have the greatest respect for his actions. So much the better for me, sir, if you speak to me, as you say, with frankness—for then you will do me the honor to esteem the resemblance of our opinion; but if you have entertained any doubt, as naturally you may, I feel that I am ruining myself by speaking the truth. But I still trust you will not esteem me the less for it, and that is my object beyond all others."

Treville was surprised to the greatest degree. So much penetration and frankness created admiration, but did not entirely remove his suspicions; the more this young man was superior to others, the more he was to be dreaded, if he meant to deceive him. Nevertheless, he pressed d'Artagnan's hand, and said to him:

"You are an honest youth; but, at the present moment, I can only do for you that which I just now offered. My mansion will always be open to you. Hereafter, being able to ask for me at all hours, and, consequently to take advantage of all opportunities, you will probably obtain your desire."

"That is to say, sir," replied d'Artagnan, "that you will wait till I have proved myself worthy of it. Well! be assured," added he, with the familiarity of a Gascon, "you shall not wait long." And he bowed on retiring, as if he considered the future was left in his own hands.

"But, wait a minute," said Treville, stopping him. "I promised you a letter for the manager of the Academy; are you too proud to accept it, young gentleman?"

"No, sir," said d'Artagnan; "and I will answer for it that this one shall not fare like the other. I will guard it so carefully that I will be sworn it shall arrive at its address, and woe be to him who attempts to take it from me!"

Treville smiled at this little boast; and, leaving his young companion in the window recess, where they had talked together, he seated himself at a table, in order to write the promised letter of recommendation. Whilst he was doing this d'Artagnan, having no better employment, amused himself with drumming a march upon the pane, and with looking at the Musketeers, who went away, one after another, following them with his eyes till they disappeared at the turning of the street.

Treville, after having written the letter, sealed it; and, rising, approached the young man, in order to give it to him. But, at the very moment that d'Artagnan stretched out his hand to receive it, he was highly astonished to see his ward make a sudden spring, turn crimson with passion, and rush from the cabinet, yelling—"'Sblood! he shall not escape me this time!"

"Who? who?" asked Treville.

"He, the letter thief!" replied d'Artagnan. "Oh! the traitor!" and he disappeared.

"The devil take the madman!" murmured Treville, "unless," added he, "this is a cunning mode of escaping, seeing that he has failed in his purpose!"

CHAPTER IV.

ATHOS' SHOULDER, PORTHOS' BALDRICK, AND ARAMIS' HANDKERCHIEF.

D'Artagnan, in fury, crossed the antechamber in three strides, and was darting towards the stairs, which he reckoned upon descending four at a time, when, in his course, he ran head foremost against a Musketeer, who was coming out of one of M. de Treville's side rooms, and striking his shoulder violently, made him utter a groan, or rather a howl.

"Excuse me," said d'Artagnan, endeavoring to resume his course, "excuse me, but I am in a hurry."

Scarcely had he descended the first stair, when a hand of iron seized him by his scarf and stopped him.

"You are in a hurry," said the Musketeer, as pale as a sheet; "under that pretense, you jostle me; you say, 'Excuse me!' and you believe that that is sufficient? Not at all, my stripling. Do you fancy that because you have heard M. de Treville speak to us a little cavalierly to-day, that other people are to treat us as he speaks to us? Undeceive yourself, my merry companion, you are not M. de Treville."

"On my faith!" replied d'Artagnan, recognizing Athos, who, after the dressing performed by the doctor, was going home, "I did not do it intentionally, and so I said, 'Excuse me!' It appears to me, quite enough. I repeat to you, however, and this time, on my word,—I think, perhaps, too often,—that I am in great haste—great haste. Leave your hold then, I beg of you, and let me go where my business calls me."

"Boy," said Athos, letting him go, "you are not polite; it is easy to perceive that you come from the hedges and ditches."

D'Artagnan had already strode down three or four stairs, when this last remark stopped him short.

"Eh?" said he, "Wherever I may come from, it is not you who can give me a lesson in good manners, I warn you."

"Perhaps!" said Athos.

"Oh! if I were not in such haste, and if I were not running after some one——" said d'Artagnan.

"Master gentleman in a hurry, you can find *me* without running after me; do you understand me?"

"And where, I pray you?"

"Near the Carmes Deschaux, about noon."

"About noon; that will do, I will be there."

"Try not to keep me waiting, for at a quarter past twelve I will cut off your ears as you run."

"Good!" cried d'Artagnan, "I will be there ten minutes before twelve."

And he set off running as if the devil possessed him, hoping that he might yet find the stranger whose slow pace could not have carried him far.

But, at the street-gate Porthos was talking with the soldier on guard. Between the two talkers there was just room for a man to pass. D'Artagnan thought it would suffice for him, and he sprang forward like a dart between them. But d'Artagnan had reckoned without the wind. As he was about to pass, it blew out Porthos' long cloak, and d'Artagnan rushed straight into the middle of it. Without doubt, Porthos had reasons for not abandoning this part of his vestments, for, instead of quitting his hold of the flap in his hand, he pulled it towards him, so that d'Artagnan rolled himself up in the velvet, by a movement of rotation explained by the persistency of Porthos.

D'Artagnan, hearing the Musketeer swear, wished to escape from under the cloak which blinded him, and endeavored to make his way out of the folds. He was particularly anxious to avoid marring the freshness of the magnificent baldrick we are acquainted with; but on timidly opening his eyes, he found himself with his nose fixed beween the two shoulders of Porthos, that is to say, exactly upon the baldrick.

Alas! like most of the things in this world with nothing in their favor but appearances!—the baldrick was glittering with gold in the front, but was nothing but plain buff behind. Vainglorious as he was, Porthos could not afford to have an entirely gold-worked baldrick, but had, at least, half one; the care on account of the cold, and the necessity for the cloak being intelligible.

"Thunder!" exclaimed Porthos, making strong efforts to get rid of d'Artagnan, who was wriggling about his back, "you must be mad to run against people in this manner!"

"Excuse me!" said d'Artagnan, reappearing under the shoulder of the giant, "but I am in such haste—I was running after some one, and——"

"And do you always forget your eyes when you happen to be in a hurry?" asked Porthos.

"No," replied d'Artagnan, piqued, "no, and thanks to my eyes, I can see what others cannot see."

Whether Porthos understood him or not, giving way to his anger, he said:

"You stand a chance of getting whipped if you run against Musketeers in this fashion."

"Whipped!" said d'Artagnan, "the expression is strong."

"It is one that becomes a man accustomed to look his enemies in the face."

"That's so: for I can well believe that you will not turn your back on yours!"

And the young man, delighted with his joke, went away laughing loudly.

Porthos foamed with rage, and made a movement to rush after.

"Presently, presently," cried the latter, "when you haven't your cloak on."

"At one o'clock, then, behind the Luxembourg."

"Very well, at one o'clock be it," replied d'Artagnan, turning the corner.

But neither in the street he had passed through, nor in the one which his eager glance pervaded, could he see any one; however slowly the stranger had walked, he was gone on his way, or perhaps had entered some house. D'Artagnan inquired of every one he met with, but learnt absolutely nothing! This chase was, however, advantageous to him in one sense, for in proportion as the perspiration broke from his forehead, his heart began to cool.

He began to reflect upon the events that had passed, numerous and inauspicious; it was scarcely eleven o'clock in the morning, and yet this morning had already brought him into disgrace with M. Treville, who could not fail to think the manner in which d'Artagnan had left him a little rude.

Besides this, he had drawn upon himself two fierce duels with two men, each capable of killing three d'Artagnans—with two Musketeers, in short, beings whom he esteemed so greatly, that he placed them in his mind and heart above all other men.

Prospects were sad. Sure of being killed by Athos, it may easily be understood that the young man was not very uneasy about Porthos. As hope, however, is the last thing extinguished in the heart of man, he finished by hoping that he might survive, although terribly wounded in both these duels, and in case of surviving, he made the following reprimands upon his own conduct:

"What a hare-brained, stupid fellow I am! That brave and unfortunate Athos was wounded exactly on that shoulder against which I must run, head-foremost, like a ram. The only thing that astonishes me is that he did not strike me dead at once: he had good cause to do so, the pain I gave him must have

been atrocious. As to Porthos,—oh! as to Porthos—that's a droll affair!

"And, in spite of himself, the young man began to laugh aloud, looking around carefully, however, to see if his solitary laugh, without any apparent cause, in the eyes of passers-by, offended no one.

"As to Porthos, that is certainly droll, but I am not the less a giddy fool. Are people to be run against without warning? No! and have I any right to go and peep under their cloaks to see what is not there? He would have pardoned me, certainly, if I had not said anything to him about that cursed baldrick, in ambiguous words, it is true, but rather, wittily ambiguous! Ah! cursed Gascon that I am, I fear that I should crack a joke if they were roasting me over a slow fire. Friend d'Artagnan," continued he, speaking to himself with the amenity that he thought due, "if you escape, of which there is not much chance, I would advise you to practice perfect politeness for the future. You must henceforth be admired and quoted as a model of it. To be obliging and polite does not necessarily make a man a coward. Look at Aramis now: mildness and grace personified. Well! did ever any one dream of saying that Aramis is a coward? No, certainly not, and from this moment I will endeavor to model myself after him. And, luckily, here he is."

D'Artagnan, walking and soliloquizing, had arrived within a few steps of the Aiguillon House, and in front perceived Aramis chatting gayly with three gentlemen of the King's Guards. On his part Aramis perceived d'Artagnan; but as he had not forgotten that it was before him that M. de Treville had been so angry in the morning, and as a witness of the rebuke was not likely to be at all agreeable, he pretended not to see him. D'Artagnan, on the contrary, quite full of his plans of conciliation and courtesy, approached the young man, with a profound bow, accompanied by a most gracious smile. Aramis bowed slightly, but did not smile. All four, besides, immediately broke off their conversation.

D'Artagnan was not so dull as not to perceive that he was not wanted; but he was not sufficiently broken into the fashions of society to know how to extricate himself handsomely from a false position, as a man's generally is who comes up and mingles with people he is scarcely acquainted with, and in a conversation that does not concern him. He was seeking in his mind, then, for the least awkward means of retreat, when he remarked that Aramis had let his handkerchief fall, and, by mistake, no doubt, had placed his foot upon it, and it appeared a favorable opportunity to repair his intrusion: he stooped, and with the most gracious air he could assume, he drew the handkerchief from under the foot, in spite of the efforts made to detain it, and holding it out to him, said:

"I believe, sir, that this is a handkerchief you would be sorry to lose?"

The handkerchief was, in fact, richly embroidered, and had a

coronet and coat of arms at one corner. Aramis blushed excessively, and snatched rather than took the handkerchief.

"Ah! ah!" exclaimed one of the guards, "will you persist in saying, most discreet Aramis, that you are not on good terms with Madame de Bois-Tracy, when that gracious lady has the kindness to lend you her handkerchief?"

Aramis darted at d'Artagnan one of those looks which inform a man that he has made a mortal enemy; then, resuming his mild air, he said:

"You are deceived, gentlemen; this handkerchief is not mine, and I cannot fancy why this gentleman has taken it into his head to offer it to me rather than to one of you, and as a proof of what I say, here is mine in my pocket."

So saying he pulled out his own handkerchief, which was likewise a very elegant handkerchief, and of fine cambric, though cambric was then dear, but a handkerchief with embroidery and without arms, only ornamented with a single cipher, that of the owner.

This time d'Artagnan perceived his mistake; but the friends of Aramis were not at all convinced by his assertion, and one of them, addressing the young Musketeer with affected seriousness, said:

"If it were as you pretend, I should be forced, my dear Aramis, to reclaim it myself; for, as you very well know, Bois-Tracy is an intimate friend of mine, and I cannot allow the property of his wife to be sported as a trophy."

"You make the demand clumsily," replied Aramis; "and whilst acknowledging the justice of your reclamation, I refuse it on account of the form."

"The fact is," hazarded d'Artagnan timidly, "I did not actually see that handkerchief fall from the pocket of M. Aramis. He had his foot upon it, that is all, and I thought the handkerchief was his."

"And you were deceived, my dear sir," replied Aramis, coldly, very little obliged for the explanation; then turning towards that guard who had declared himself the friend of Bois-Tracy; —"Besides," continued he, "I have reflected, my dear intimate friend of Bois-Tracy, that I am not less tenderly his friend than you can possibly be, so that decidedly this handkerchief is as likely to have fallen from your pocket as mine?"

"No, upon my honor!"

"You are about to swear upon your honor and I upon my word, and then it will be pretty evident that one of us will have lied. Now here, Montaran, we will do better than that; let each take a half."

"Perfectly fair," cried the two other guardsmen—"the judgment of King Solomon! Aramis, you certainly are full of wisdom!"

They burst into a loud laugh, and, as may be supposed, the incident bore no other fruit. In a moment or two the conversation ceased, and the three guards and the Musketeer, after

having cordially shaken hands, separated, they going one way and Aramis another.

"Now is my time to make my peace with this gentleman," said d'Artagnan to himself, having stood on one side during the whole of the latter part of the conversation, and with this good feeling drawing near to Aramis, who was going off without pay-any attention to him, he said:

"You will excuse me, I hope."

"Ah!" interrupted Aramis, "permit me to observe to you, sir, that you have not acted in this affair as a man of good breeding ought."

"What!" cried d'Artagnan, "do you suppose——"

"I suppose, that you are not a fool, and that you knew very well, although coming from Gascony, that people do not stand upon pocket-handkerchiefs without a reason. What the devil, Paris is not paved with cambric!"

"Sir, you act wrongly in endeavoring to mortify me," said d'Artagnan, with whom the natural quarrelsome spirit began to speak more loudly than his pacific resolutions. "I come from Gascony, it is true and since you know it, there is no occasion to tell you that Gascons are not very enduring, so that when they have begged to be excused once, were it even for a folly, they are convinced that they have done already as least as much again as they ought to have done."

"Sir, what I say to you about the matter," said Aramis, "is not for the sake of seeking a quarrel. Thank heaven, I am not a swashbuck and, being a Musketeer but for a time, I only fight when I am forced to do so, and always with great repugnance; but this time the affair is serious, for here is a lady compromised by you."

"By us, you mean," cried d'Artagnan.

"Why did you so awkwardly restore me the handkerchief?"

"Why did you so awkwardly let it fall?"

"I have said that the handkerchief did not fall from my pocket."

"Well, and by saying so, you have lied twice, sir, for I saw it fall."

"Oh, ho! you take it up in that way, do you, Master Gascon? Well, I will teach you how to behave yourself."

"And I will send you back to your pulpit, Master Priest. Draw, if you please, and instantly——"

"Not so, if you please my good friend, not here, at least. Do you not perceive that we are opposite Aiguillon Houses, full of the Cardinal's creatures? How do I know that it is not his Eminence who has honored you with the commission to bring him in my head? Now I entertain a ridiculous partiality for my head, it seems to suit my shoulders so admirably. I have no objection to killing you, depend upon that, but quietly, in a snug remote spot, where you will not be able to boast of your death to anybody."

"I agree, but do not be too confident, and take away your

handkerchief; whether it belongs to you or another, you may, perhaps, stand in need of it to bind a wound. As a Gascon, I do not postpone meetings through prudence?"

"Prudence is a virtue sufficiently useless to Musketeers, I know, but indispensable to churchmen and as I am only a Musketeer provisionally, I hold it good to be prudent. At two o'clock, I shall have the honor of expecting you at Treville's.

"There I will point out to you the best place and time."

The two bowed and separated, Aramis ascending the street which led to the Louxembourg, whilst d'Artagnan, perceiving the appointed hour was approaching, took the road to the Carmes-Deschaux, saying to himself, "decidedly, I cannot hope to come out of these scrapes alive; but if I am doomed to be slain, it will be by a Royal Musketeer."

CHAPTER V.

KING'S MUSKETEERS AND CARDINAL'S GUARDS.

D'ARTAGNAN was acquainted with nobody in Paris. He went, therefore, to his appointment with Athos, without a second, determined to be satisfied with those his adversary should choose. Besides, his intention was formed to make the brave Musketeer all suitable apologies, but without meanness or weakness, fearing that result from this duel, which occurs when a young and vigorous man fights an adversary wounded and weakened; if conquered, he doubles the triumph of his antagonist; if a conqueror, he is accused of foul play and easy boldness.

Now, we must have badly painted the character of our adventurer, or our readers must have already perceived that d'Artagnan was not a common man; therefore whilst repeating that his death was inevitable, he did not make up his mind to die so quietly as another, less courageous and less moderate than he might have done in his place. He reflected upon the different characters of the men he had to fight with, and began to view his situation more clearly. He hoped, by means of loyal excuses, to make a friend of Athos, whose noble air and austere bearing, pleased him much. He flattered himself he should be able to frighten Porthos with the story of the baldrick, which he might, if not killed upon the spot, relate to everybody—to cover Porthos with ridicule; as to the astute Aramis, he did not entertain much dread of him, and if he should be able to get so far as him, he determined to despatch him in good style, or, at least by slashing him across the face, as Cæsar recommended his soldiers to do to Pompey's, damage the beauty of which he was so proud, forever.

In addition d'Artagnan possessed that invincible stock of resolution which the counsels of his father had implanted in his heart—"Brook nothing from any one but the King, the Cardinal, and M. de Treville." He flew then, rather than walked, towards

the Monastery of the Carmes-Dechausses, or rather Dechaux, a building without a window, surrounded by barren fields, and accessory to the Pre-aux-Clercs, and generally employed as the place for duels of men who had no time to lose.

When d'Artagnan arrived in sight of the bare spot of ground which extended along the foot of the monastery, Athos had been waiting about five minutes, and twelve o'clock was striking; he was, then, punctual and the most rigorous casuist with regard to duels could have nothing to say.

Athos, who still suffered grievously from his wound, though it had been dressed by M. de Treville's surgeon at nine, was seated on a post and waiting for his adversary with that placid countenance and noble air which never forsook him. At sight of d'Artagnan, he arose and came politely a few steps to meet him. The latter, on his side, saluted his adversary with hat in hand, and the feather even draggling on the ground.

"Sir," said Athos, "I notified two of my friends as seconds, but they are not yet come, at which I am astonished, as it is not at all their custom to be behindhand."

"I have no seconds on my part," said d'Artagnan; "for, having only arrived yesterday in Paris, I as yet know no one but M. de Treville, to whom I was recommended by my father, who has the honor to be, in some degree, one of his friends."

Athos reflected for an instant.

"You know no one but M. de Treville?" he asked.

"No, I only know him."

"Well, but then," continued Athos, speaking partly to himself, "well, but then, if I kill you, I shall have the air of an ogre who kills children."

"Not too much so," replied d'Artagnan, with a bow not deficient in dignity, "since you do me the honor to draw a sword with me whilst suffering from a wound which is very painful."

"Very painful, upon my word, and you hurt me devilishly, I can tell you; but I will take the left hand—I usually do so in such circumstances. Do not fancy that I favor you—I use both hands alike; and it will be even a disadvantage to you—a left-handed man is very troublesome to fencers not used to it. I regret I did not inform you sooner of this circumstance."

"You have truly, sir," said d'Artagnan, bowing again, "a courtesy for which, I assure you, I am very grateful."

"You confuse me," replied Athos, with his gentlemanly air; "let us talk of something else, if you please. Whew! how you hurt me! my shoulder burns."

"If you would permit me—," said d'Artagnan, with timidity, "I have a miraculous balsam for wounds—given to me by my mother—of which I have made a trial upon myself, so I am sure that in less than three days it would cure you; and at the end of three days, when cured—well, sir, it would still do me a great honor to be your man."

D'Artagnan spoke these words with a simplicity that did honor

to his courtesy without throwing the least doubt upon his courage.

"Bravo, sir!" said Athos, "that's a proposition that pleases me; not that I accept it, but it savors of the gentleman a league off. It was thus spoke the gallant knights of Charlemagne, in whom every knight sought to seek his model. Unfortunately we do not live in the time of the great Emperor, but in that of the Cardinal, and three days hence, however well the secret might be guarded, it would be known, I say, that we were to fight, and our combat would be prevented. But I think those fellows will never come!"

"If you are in haste," said d'Artagnan, with the same simplicity with which a moment before he had proposed to him to put off the duel for three days, "if you are in haste, and if it be your will to despatch me at once, do not inconvenience yourself—I am ready."

"Well, that is again well said," cried Athos, with a gracious nod to d'Artagnan; "that did not come from a man without brains, and certainly not from a man without a heart. I love men of your metal, and I foresee plainly that, if we don't kill each other, I shall hereafter have much pleasure in your conversation. We will wait for those gentlemen, if you please; I have plenty of time, and it will be more correct. Oh! here is one of them, I think."

In fact, at the end of the Rue Vaugiraud a gigantic form began to loom up.

"What!" cried d'Artagnan, "is your second M. Porthos?"

"Yes; any objection?"

"Oh, not at all."

"And here comes the other."

D'Artagnan turned in the direction pointed out and perceived Aramis.

"What!" cried he, in an accent of greater astonishment than before, "is your other second M. Aramis?"

"Of course! Are you not aware that we are never seen one without the others, and that we are called by the Musketeers and the Guards, the court and the city, Athos, Porthos, and Aramis, or the Three Inseparables? But yet, as you come from Daxor Pau——"

"From Tarbes," said d'Artagnan.

"Your ignorance of the circumstance is pardonable," Athos allowed.

"Faith," ejaculated the Gascon, "you are well named, gentlemen and my adventure, if it should make any noise, will prove at least that your union is not founded upon contracts."

In the meantime Porthos had come up, waved his hand to Athos, and then turning towards d'Artagnan, stood quite astonished.

Permit us to say that he had changed his baldrick, and was without his cloak.

"Helloa!" said he, "what does this mean?"

"This is the gentleman I am going to fight with," said Athos, pointing to d'Artagnan, and saluting him with the same gesture.

"Why, it is with him I am also going to fight," said Porthos.

"But not before one o'clock," replied d'Artagnan.

"Well, and I also am going to fight with this gentleman," said Aramis, coming on to the ground as he spoke.

"But not till two o'clock," said d'Artagnan, with the same calmness.

"But what are you going to fight about, Athos?" asked Aramis.

"I don't know very well; he hurt my shoulder. And you, Porthos?"

"Truth to say, I am going to fight because I like to fight," answered Porthos, coloring deeply.

Athos, whose keen eye lost nothing, perceived a faint, sly smile pass over the lips of the young Gascon, as he replied:

"We had a discussion upon dress."

"And you, Aramis?" asked Athos.

"Oh, ours is a theological dispute," replied Aramis, making a sign to d'Artagnan to keep secret the cause.

Athos saw a second smile on the lips of d'Artagnan.

"Indeed?" said Athos.

"Yes a point in St. Augustine, upon which we could not agree," said the Gascon.

"Plainly, this is a smart lad," murmured Athos.

"And now you are all assembled, gentlemen," said d'Artagnan, "permit me to offer you my apologies."

At this word, a cloud passed over Athos's brow, a haughty smile curled Porthos's lip, and the reply of Aramis was a shake of the head.

"You do not understand me, gentlemen," said d'Artagnan, holding up his head, the sharp and bold lines of which were at the moment gilded by a bright sunbeam. "I ask to be excused in case I should not be able to discharge my debt to all three; for M. Athos has the right to kill me first, which does not leave much of your antagonist for you, M. Porthos, and will probably leave none for you, M. Aramis. And now, gentlemen, accepting my apologies—but on this score solely—out swords, and stand on your guard!"

At these words, with the most dashing air possible, d'Artagnan drew his sword.

The blood had mounted to his head, and at that moment he would have drawn his sword against all the Musketeers in the kingdom, as willingly as he now did against the three.

It was a quarter past noon. The sun was at its zenith, and the spot chosen for the theatre of the duel was exposed to its full power.

"It is very hot," said Athos, drawing his sword in his turn, "and yet I cannot take off my doublet; for I just now felt my

wound begin to bleed again, and I should not like to annoy my opponent with the sight of blood not drawn by himself."

"That is true," replied d'Artagnan, "and, whether drawn by myself or another, I assure you I shall always view with regret the blood of so brave a gentleman; I will therefore fight in my doublet, as you do."

"Come, come, enough of compliments," cried Porthos; "please to remember we are waiting for our turns."

"Speak for yourself when you are inclined to utter such rudeness," interrupted Aramis. "For my part, I think what they say is very nicely spoken, and quite worthy of two gentlemen."

"When you please," said Athos, putting himself on guard.

"I waited your orders," said d'Artagnan, crossing swords.

But scarcely had the two rapiers clashed than a squad of the guards of his Eminence, commanded by M. de Jussac, turned the monastery wall.

"The guards! the Cardinal's guards!" shouted Aramis and Porthos at the same time. "Sheath swords! gentlemen! sheath swords!"

But it was too late. The two combatants had been seen in a position which left no doubt of their intentions.

"Helloa!" cried Jussac, advancing towards them, and making a sign to his men to do so likewise, "soho! Musketeers fighting here, then, are you? how about the edict against armed encounters?"

"You are very generous, gentlemen of the guards," said Athos, with acrimony, for Jussac was one of the aggressors of the preceding day. "If we were to see you fighting, I can assure you that we would make no effort to prevent you. Leave us alone, then, and you will enjoy a little amusement without cost to yourselves."

"Gentlemen," said Jussac, "it is with great regret that I pronounce the thing impossible. Duty before everything. Put up your swords, then, if you please, and follow us."

"Captain," said Aramis, parodying Jussac, "it would afford us great pleasure to obey your polite invitation, if it depended upon ourselves; but, unfortunately, the thing is impossible: M. de Treville has forbidden it. Pass on your way, then; it is the best thing you can do."

This raillery exasperated Jussac.

"We must charge upon you, then," said he, "if you disobey."

"There are five of them," said Athos, half aloud, "and we are but three; we shall be beaten again, and must die on the spot, for, on my part, I declare I will never appear before our captain again as a conquered man."

Athos, Porthos, and Aramis, instantly closed up together, and Jussac drew up his soldiers.

This short interval was sufficient to determine d'Artagnan on the part he was to take; it was one of those events which decide the life of a man; it was a choice between the King and the Cardinal; the choice made, it must be persisted in. To fight

was to disobey the law, to risk his head, to make at once an enemy of a minister more powerful than the King himself; all this the young man perceived, and yet, to his praise we speak it, he did not hesitate a second. Turning towards Athos and his friends, he said:

"Gentlemen, allow me to correct your words, if you please. You said there were but three, but it appears to me we are four."

"But you are not one of us," said Porthos.

"That's true," replied d'Artagnan; "I do not wear the uniform, but I am in spirit. My heart is a Musketeer; I feel it, and that impels me."

"Withdraw, young man," cried Jussac, who, doubtless, by his gestures and the expression of his countenance, had guessed d'Artagnan's design. "You may retire; we allow you to do so. Save your skin; begone quickly."

D'Artagnan did not budge.

"Decidedly, you are a fine blade," said Athos, pressing the young man's hand.

"Come, come, decide one way or the other," replied Jussac.

"Well," said Porthos to Aramis, "we must do something."

"You are very generous," said Athos.

But all three reflected upon the youth of d'Artagnan, and dreaded his inexperience.

"We should only be three, one of whom is wounded, with the addition of a boy," resumed Athos, "and yet it will be not the less said we were four men."

"Yes, but to yield!" said Porthos.

"That's hard," replied Athos.

D'Artagnan comprehended this irresolution.

"Try me, gentlemen," said he, "and I swear to you by my honor that I will not go hence if we are conquered."

"What is your name, my brave fellow?" said Athos.

"D'Artagnan."

"Well, then! Athos, Porthos, Aramis, and d'Artagnan, forward!" cried Athos.

"Come, gentlemen, have you made your minds up?" cried Jussac, for the third time.

"It is done, gentlemen," said Athos.

"And what do you mean to do?" asked Jussac.

"We are about to have the honor of charging you," replied Aramis, lifting his hat with one hand and drawing his sword with the other.

"Oh! you resist, do you?" cried Jussac.

"Of course! Does that astonish you?"

And the nine combatants rushed upon each other with a madness which, however, did not exclude some method.

Athos fixed upon one Cahusac, a favorite of the Cardinal's; Porthos had Bicarat, and Aramis found himself opposed to two adversaries. As to d'Artagnan, he sprang towards Jussac himself.

The heart of the young Gascon beat as if it would burst

through his side; not from fear, God be thanked!—he had not the shade of it,—but with emulation; he fought like a furious tiger, turning ten times round his adversary, and shifting his ground and his guard twenty times. Jussac was, as was then said, a fine blade, and had had much practice; nevertheless, it required all his skill to defend himself against an adversary who, active and energetic, departed every instant from received rules, attacking him on all sides at once, and yet parrying like a man who had the greatest respect for his own epidermis.

This contest at length exhausted Jussac's patience. Furious at being held in check by one whom he had considered a boy, he became warm, and began to commit faults. D'Artagnan, who, though wanting in practice, had a profound theory, redoubled his agility. Jussac, anxious to put an end to this, springing forward, aimed a terrible thrust at his adversary, but the latter parried it; and whilst Jussac was recovering himself, glided like a serpent beneath his blade, and ran his sword through his body. Jussac fell like a mass of dead flesh.

D'Artagnan then cast an anxious and rapid glance over the field of battle.

Aramis had killed one of his adversaries, but the other pressed him warmly. Nevertheless, Aramis was in good condition, and able to defend himself.

Bicarat and Porthos had just made counter-hits; Porthos had received a thrust through his arm, and Bicarat one through his thigh. But neither of the wounds was serious, and they only fought the more earnestly.

Athos, wounded again by Cahusac, became evidently paler, but did not give way a foot: he had only changed his sword-hand, and fought with his left hand.

According to the laws of duelling at that period, d'Artagnan was at liberty to assist the friend he chose. Whilst he was endeavoring to find out which of his companions stood in greatest need, he caught a glance from Athos. This glance was of sublime eloquence. Athos would have died rather than appeal for help; but he could look, and with that look ask assistance. D'Artagnan interpreted it; with a terrible bound, he sprang to the side of Cahusac, shouting:

"Take me as your man, sir! be on your guard, or I shall slay you!"

Cahusac turned; it was time, for Athos, whose great courage alone supported him, sank upon his knee.

"'Sblood!" cried he to d'Artagnan, "do not kill him, young man, I beg of you; I have an old grudge to settle with him, when I am cured and sound again. Disarm him only—make sure of his sword; that's it, that's it! well done! very well done!"

This exclamation was drawn from Athos by seeing the sword of Cahusac fly twenty paces from him. D'Artagnan and Cahusac sprang forward at the same instant, the one to recover, the other to obtain the sword; but d'Artagnan, being the more active, reached it first, and planted his foot upon it.

Cahusac immediately ran to one of the guards' swords whom Aramis had killed, and returned towards d'Artagnan; but on his way he met Athos, who, during this relief which D'Artagnan had procured him, had recovered his wind, and who, for fear that d'Artagnan should kill his enemy, wished to resume the fight.

D'Artagnan perceived that it would be disobliging Athos not to leave him alone; and in a few minutes Cahusac fell, with a sword-thrust through his throat.

At the same instant Aramis placed his sword-point on the breast of his fallen enemy, and compelled him to sue for mercy.

There only then remained Porthos and Bicarat. Porthos made a thousand witticisms, asking Bicarat what o'clock it could be, and offering him his compliments upon his brother's having just obtained a company in the Navarre regiment; but, joke as he might, he gained no advantage—Bicarat was one of those iron men who never fall till dead.

Nevertheless, it was necessary to put an end to the affair. The watch might come up, and take all the combatants, wounded or not, Royalists or Cardinalists. Athos, Aramis, and d'Artagnan surrounded Bicarat, and summoned him to surrender. Though alone against all, and with a wound in his thigh, Bicarat wished to hold out; but Jussac, who had risen upon his elbow, bade him to yield. Bicarat was a Gascon, like d'Artagnan; he turned a deaf ear, and contented himself with laughing; and between two parries, finding time to point to a spot of earth with his sword, he said, parodying a verse of the Bible: "Here will Bicarat die, the only one of those who went out with him!"

"But there are four against you; leave off, I command you!"

"Ah! if you command me, that's another thing," said Bicarat; "you being my leader, it is my duty to obey."

And, springing backward, he broke his sword across his knee, to avoid surrendering it, threw the pieces over the wall, and crossed his arms, whistling a Cardinalist air.

Bravery is always respected, even in an enemy. The Musketeers saluted Bicarat with their swords, and returned them to their sheaths. D'Artagnan did the same; then, assisted by Bicarat, the only one left standing, he bore Jussac, Cahusac, and that one of Aramis's adversaries who was only wounded, under the porch. The fourth, as stated, was dead. They then rang the bell, and, carrying away four swords out of five, they took their road, intoxicated with joy, towards Treville House.

They walked arm in arm, occupying the whole width of the street, and linking on every Musketeer they met; it in the end became a triumphal march. D'Artagnan's heart swam in delight; he marched between Athos and Porthos, pressing them tenderly.

"If I am not yet a Musketeer," said he to his new friends, as he passed through the gateway, "at least I have entered upon my apprenticeship, haven't I?"

CHAPTER VI.

THE KING IN TEDIUM.

This battle made a great noise. Treville scolded his Musketeers in public and congratulated them in private; but as no time was to be lost in gaining the King, Treville made all haste to the Louvre. But he was too late: the King was closeted with the Cardinal, and the caller was informed that the King was busy, and could not receive him. In the evening Treville attended the King's card-table. The King was winning, and as he was very avaricious, he was in an excellent humor; for perceiving him at a distance, he said:

"Come here, Captain, that I may scold you. Do you know that his Eminence has just come to make fresh complaints against your Musketeers, and that with so much emotion that his Eminence is indisposed this evening? Why, these Musketeers of yours are the devil's own."

"No, sire," replied Treville, who saw at the first glance which turn things would take—"no, sire; on the contrary, they are good lads, as meek as lambs, and have but one desire, I'll be their warranty; and that is, that their swords may never leave their scabbards but in your majesty's service. But what are they to do? the guards of the Cardinal are forever seeking quarrels with them and for the honor of the corps, even, the poor young men are obliged to defend themselves."

"Listen to M. de Treville," said the King; "listen to him! would not one say he was speaking of a religious community! In truth, my dear Captain, I have a great mind to take away your commission, and give it to Mlle. de Chemerault, to whom I promised an abbey. But don't fancy that I am going to take you on your bare word; I am called Louis the Just, de Treville, and by-and-by, we will see."

"Ah! it is because I have a perfect reliance upon that justice that I shall wait patiently and quietly the good pleasure of your majesty."

"Wait, then, wait," said the King; "I will not detain you long."

In fact, fortune changed, and as the King began to lose what he had won, he was not sorry to find an excuse for leaving off.

The King then arose a minute after, and putting the money which lay before him into his pocket, the major part of which arose from his winnings, he said:

"La Vieuville, take my place; I must speak to M. de Treville on a matter of importance. Oh, I had eighty louis before me; put down the same sum, so that they who have lost may have nothing to complain of—justice before everything." Then turning towards M. de Treville, and walking with him towards the embrasure of a window, he continued:

"Well, you say it is his Eminence's guards who have sought a quarrel with your Musketeers?"

"Yes, sire, as they always do."

"And how did the thing happen? let us see, for you know, my dear Captain, a judge must hear both sides."

"Good lord! in the most simple and natural manner possible. Three of my best soldiers, whom your majesty knows by name, and whose devotedness you have more than once appreciated, and who have, I dare affirm to the King, his service much at heart; three of my best soldiers, I say—Messrs. Athos, Porthos, and Aramis—had arranged a party of pleasure with a young springald from Gascony, whom I had introduced to them the same morning. The party was to take place at St. Germain, I believe, and they had appointed to meet at the Carmes-Deschaux, when they were disturbed by M. de Jussac, MM. Cahusac, Biscarat, and two other guards, who certainly did not go there in such a numerous company without some ill intention against the edicts."

"Ah, ah! you incline me to think so," said the King; "there is no doubt they went thither to fight themselves."

"I do not accuse them, sire; but I leave your majesty to judge what five armed men could possibly be going to do in such a retired spot as the environs of the Convent des Carmes."

"You are right, Treville—you are right!"

"But, upon seeing my Musketeers, they changed their minds, and forgot their private hatred for the feud against your Musketeers; for your majesty cannot be ignorant that the Musketeers, who belong to the King, and to nobody but the King, are the natural enemies of the guards, who belong to the Cardinal."

"Yes, Treville, yes!" said the King, in a melancholy tone; "and it is very sad, believe me, to see thus two parties in France, two heads to royalty. But all this will come to an end, Treville—to an end. You say, then, that the guards sought a quarrel with the Musketeers?"

"I say that things have fallen out so, but I will not swear to it, sire. You know how difficult it is to discover the truth; and unless a man endowed with that admirable instinct which causes Louis XIII. to be termed the Just——"

"You are right, Treville; but your Musketeers were not alone—they had a youth with them?"

"Yes, sire, and one wounded man; so that three of the King's Musketeers—one of whom was wounded, and a youth—not only maintained their ground against five of the most terrible of his Eminence's guards, but ultimately brought four of them to the earth."

"Why, this is a victory!" cried the King, glowing with delight, "a complete victory!"

"Yes, sire; complete."

"Four men, one of them wounded, and a youth, say you?"

"One scarcely attained the age of a young man; but who, however, behaved himself so admirably on this occasion, that I take the liberty of recommending him to your majesty. His

name is d'Artagnan, sire; he is the son of one of my oldest friends—the son of a man who served under your father of glorious memory, in the partisan war."

"And you say that this young man behaved himself well? Tell me how, de Treville—you know how I delight in accounts of war and fights."

And Louis XIII. twisted his moustache proudly, placing his hand upon his hip.

"Sire," resumed Treville, "as I told you, M. d'Artagnan is little more than a boy, and as he has not the honor of being a Musketeer, he was dressed privately; the guards perceiving his youth, and still more, that he did not belong to the military, pressed him to retire before they attacked."

"So you may plainly see, Treville," interrupted the King, "it was they who attacked?"

"That is true, sire; there can be no more doubt on that head. They called upon him then to retire, but he answered that he was a Musketeer at heart, entirely devoted to your majesty, and that he would therefore remain with the Musketeers."

"Brave boy!" murmured the King.

"Well, he did remain with them; and your majesty has in him so firm a champion that it was he who gave Jussac the terrible sword-thrust which has made the Cardinal so angry."

"He the one who wounded Jussac?" cried the King—"he, a boy? Treville, that's impossible! Jussac is one of the first swordsmen in the kingdom?"

"Well, sire, for once he found his master."

"I should like to see this young man, Treville—I should like to see him; and if anything can be done for him; well, we will make it our business."

"When will your majesty deign to receive him?"

"To-morrow, at midday, Treville."

"Shall I bring him alone?"

"No; bring me all four together; I wish to thank them all at once. Devoted men are so rare, Treville, we must recompense devotedness."

"At twelve o'clock, sire, we will be at the Louvre."

"Ah! by the back stairs, Treville, by the back; it is useless to let the Cardinal know."

"Yes, sire."

"You understand, Treville; an edict is an edict—it is forbidden to fight, remember."

"But this encounter, sire, is quite out of the ordinary conditions of a duel; it is a brawl, and the proof is that there were five of the Cardinal's guards against my three Musketeers and M. d'Artagnan."

"That is true," said the King; "but never mind, Treville, come still by the back."

Treville smiled. But as it was already something to have prevailed upon this child to rebel against his master, he saluted

the King respectfully, and, with this agreement, took leave of him.

That evening the three Musketeers were informed of the honor which was granted them. As they had long been acquainted with the King, they were not much excited by the circumstance; but d'Artagnan, with his Gascon imagination, saw in it his future fortune, and passed the night in golden dreams. As early, then, as eight o'clock, he was at Athos' lodgings, where he found the Musketeer dressed and ready to go out. As the hour to wait upon the King was not till twelve, he had made a party with Porthos and Aramis to play a game in a tennis-court situated near the stables of the Luxembourg. Athos invited d'Artagnan to follow them; and, although ignorant of the game, which he had never played, he accepted the invitation, not knowing what to do with his time from nine till twelve.

The two Musketeers were already there, playing together. Athos, very expert in all bodily exercises, passed with d'Artagnan to the opposite side, and challenged them; but at the first effort he made, although he played with his left hand, he found that his wound was yet too recent to allow of such exertion. D'Artagnan remained, therefore, alone; and as he declared he was too ignorant of the game to play it regularly, they only continued sending balls to each other, without counting; but one of these balls, launched by Porthos's herculean hand, passed so close to d'Artagnan's face, that he thought if, instead of passing near, it had hit him, his audience would have been probably lost, as it would have been impossible for him to have presented himself before the King. Now, as upon this audience in his Gascon imagination depended his future life, he saluted Aramis and Porthos politely, declaring that he would not resume the game until he should be prepared to play with them on more equal terms; and he went and took his place near the cord and in the gallery.

Unfortunately for d'Artagnan, among the spectators was one of his Eminence's guards, who, still irritated by the defeat of his companions only the day before, had promised himself to seize the first opportunity of avenging it. He believed this opportunity was now come, and addressing his neighbor, remarked:

"It it not astonishing that that young man should be afraid of a ball; he is doubtless a budding Musketeer."

D'Artagnan turned round as if a serpent had stung him, and fixed his eyes upon the insolent speaker.

"Yes!" resumed the latter, twisting his moustache, "look at me as long as you like, my little gentleman, I have said what I have said."

"And as since that which you have said is too clear to require any explanation," replied d'Artagnan, in a low voice, "I beg you will follow me immediately."

"Of course you know who I am?"

"I! no, I am completely ignorant; and I care less."

"You're in the wrong there for if you knew my name, perhaps you would not be in such a hurry. It is Bernajoux."

"Well, M. d'Bernajoux," said d'Artagnan, quietly, "I will wait for you at the door."

"Go on, I follow you."

"Do not appear to be in a hurry, so as to cause it to be observed that we go out together; you must be aware that for that which we have in hand, company would be inconvenient."

"That's true," said the guard, astonished that his name had not produced more effect upon the young man.

In fact, Bernajoux was known to everybody, d'Artagnan alone excepted, perhaps; for he was one of those who figured most frequently in the daily brawls, which all the edicts of the Cardinal had not been able to repress.

Porthos and Aramis were so engaged with their game, and Athos was watching them with so much attention, that they did not even perceive their young companion go out, who, as he had told his Eminence's guard, stopped outside the door; an instant after, the soldier descended. As d'Artagnan had no time to lose, on account of the audience fixed for mid-day, he cast his eyes around, and seeing that the street was empty, he said: "It is fortunate for you, although your name is Bernajoux, to have only to deal with a budding Musketeer; never mind, be content, I will do my best.—Guard!"

"But," said he whom d'Artagnan thus provoked, "it appears to me that this place is very ill-chosen, and that we should be better behind St. Germain's Abbey or in the Pre-aux-Clercs."

"What you saw is very sensible," replied d'Artagnan; "but unfortunately, I have very little time to spare, having an appointment at twelve precisely. Guard! then, guard!"

Bernajoux was not a man to have such a compliment paid to him twice. In an instant his sword glittered in his hand, and he sprang upon his adversary, whom, from his youth, he hoped to intimidate.

But d'Artagnan had on the preceding day gone through his apprenticeship. Fresh, sharpened by his victory, full of the hopes of future favor, he was resolved not to give a step; so the swords were crossed close to the hilts, and as d'Artagnan stood firm, it was his adversary who made the retreating step; but d'Artagnan seized the moment at which, in this movement, the sword of Bernajoux deviated from the line; he freed his weapon, made a lunge, and touched his adversary on the shoulder. D'Artagnan immediately made a step backwards and raised his sword; but Bernajoux cried out that it was nothing, and rushing blindly upon him, absolutely spitted himself upon d'Artagnan's sword. As, however, he did not fall, or declare himself conquered, but only broke away towards Tremouille House, in whose service he had a relative, d'Artagnan was ignorant of the seriousness of the last wound his adversary had received, pressed him warmly, and without doubt would have soon completed his work with a third thrust, when the noise which

arose from the street being heard in the tennis-court, two of the friends of the guard, who had seen him go out after exchanging some words with d'Artagnan, rushed, sword in hand, from the court, and fell upon the conqueror.

But Athos, Porthos, and Aramis quickly appeared in their turn, and the moment the two guards attacked their young companion drove them back. Bernajoux now fell, and as the guards were only two against four, they began to shout, "To the rescue! Tremouille!" At these cries, all who were in the duke's mansion rushed out, falling upon the four companions, who, on their side, cried aloud, "to the rescue! Musketeers!"

This cry was generally attended to; for the Musketeers were known to be enemies to the Cardinal, and were beloved on account of the hatred they bore to his enemies. Thus the soldiers of other lifeguard companies than those which belong to the Red Duke, as Aramis had called him, in general, in these quarrels took part with the King's Musketeers. Of three guards of the company of Desessarts who were passing, two came to the assistance of the four companions, whilst the other ran towards Treville's crying: "To the rescue! Musketeers! rescue!" As usual, this house was full of soldiers, who hastened to the succor of their comrades; the fight became general, the strength was on the side of the Musketeers; the Cardinal's guards and Tremouille's people retreated into the hotel, the doors of which they closed just in time to prevent their enemies from entering with them. As to the wounded man, he had been taken in at once, and, as we have said, in a very bad state.

Excitement was at its height among the Musketeers and their allies, and they even began to deliberate whether they should not set fire to the mansion to punish the insolence of Tremouille's domestics, in daring to make a rush upon the King's Musketeers.

The proposition had been made, and received with enthusiasm, when fortunately eleven o'clock struck; d'Artagnan and his companions remembered their audience, and as they would very much have regretted that such a deed should be performed without them, they succeeded in quieting their coadjutors. The latter contented themselves with hurling some paving stones against the gates, but they were too strong; they then grew tired of the sport; besides, those considered as the leaders of the enterprise had quitted the group and were making their way towards Treville's, who was waiting for them, already informed of this fresh disturbance.

"Quick, to the Louvre," said he, "to the Louvre without losing an instant, and let us endeavor to see the King before he is prejudiced by the Cardinal: we will describe the matter to him as a sequel to the affair of yesterday, and the two will pass off together."

Treville, accompanied by his followers, directed his course towards the Louvre; but to the great astonishment of the Captain, he was informed that the King was gone stag-hunting in the forest of St. Germain. Treville required this intelligence to

be repeated to him twice, and each time his companions saw his brow become darker.

"Had his Majesty," asked he, "any intention of holding this hunting party yesterday?"

"No, your excellency," replied the valet de chambre, "the Grand Huntsman came this morning to inform him that he had marked down a stag. He, at first, answered that he would not go, but could not resist his love of sport, and set out after dinner."

"Has the King seen the Cardinal?" asked Treville.

"Most probably he has," replied the valet, "for I saw the horses harnessed to his Eminence's carriage this morning, and when I asked where he was going, I was told to St. Germain."

"He is beforehand with us," said M. de Treville. "Gentlemen, I will see the King this evening; but I do not advise you to risk doing so."

This advice was too reasonable, and, moreover, came from a man who knew the King too well, to allow the four to dispute it. Treville recommended them each to retire home, and wait for news from him.

On entering his house, Treville thought it best to be first in making the complaint. He sent one of his servants to the Duke of La Tremouille with a letter, in which he begged of him to eject the Cardinal's guard from his house, and to reprimand his people for their audacity in assailing the King's Musketeers. Tremouille, already prejudiced by his squire, whose relative, as we already know, Bernajoux was, replied that it was neither for Captain Treville nor the Musketeers to complain, but on the contrary, he, whose people the Musketeers had assaulted and whose house they had endeavored to burn. Now, as the debate between these two nobles might last a long time, each becoming, naturally, more firm in his own opinion, Treville thought of an expedient, which might terminate it quietly; which was to go himself to the duke's.

He repaired, then, immediately, and caused himself to be announced.

The two nobles saluted each other politely, for if no friendship existed between them, there was at least esteem. Both were men of courage and honor; and as Tremouille, a Protestant, and seeing the King seldom, was of no party, he did not, in general, carry any bias into his social relations. This time, however, his address, although polite, was colder than usual.

"My lord!" said Treville, "we fancy that we have each cause to complain of the other, and I am come to endeavor to clear up this affair."

"I have no objection," replied the peer, "but I warn you that I have inquired well into it, and all the fault lies with your men."

"You are too just and reasonable a man, my lord!" said Treville, "not to accept the proposal I am about to make to you."

"Make it, I am attentive."

"How is M. Bernajoux, your squire's relation?"

"Why, very ill, indeed! In addition to the sword-thrust in his arm, not dangerous, he has received another right through his lungs, of which the doctor speaks very unfavorably."

"But is the wounded man sensible?"

"With difficulty he can speak."

"Well, let us go to him; let us adjure him, in the name of the God before whom he is called upon, perhaps quickly, to appear, to speak the truth, I will take him for judge in his own cause, your grace, and will believe what he will say."

Both descended to the chamber in which the wounded man lay.

What Treville had foreseen, happened. Placed between life and death, as Bernajoux was, he had no idea for a moment of concealing the truth; and he described to the two nobles the affair exactly as it had passed.

This was all that Treville wanted; he wished Bernajoux a speedy recovery, took leave of Tremouille, returned home, and immediately sent word to the four friends that he awaited their company to dinner.

Towards six o'clock, M. de Treville announced that it was time to go to the palace; but as the hour of audience granted by his Majesty was past, instead of claiming the entry by the back-stairs, he placed himself with the four men in the antechamber. Our friends had been waiting about half an hour, mingled with the courtiers, when all the doors were thrown open, and his Majesty was announced.

D'Artagnan felt himself quiver to the very marrow. The instant about to follow would, in all probability, decide his future life. His eyes, therefore, were fixed in agony upon the door through which the King would pass.

Louis XIII. appeared, walking fast; he was in hunting costume, covered with dust, wearing large boots, and had a whip in his hand. At the first glance, d'Artagnan judged that his mind was stormy.

This disposition, visible as it was, did not prevent the courtiers from ranging themselves upon his passage. In royal antechambers it is better to be looked upon with an angry eye, than not to be looked upon at all. The three Musketeers, therefore, did not hesitate to make a step forward; d'Artagnan, on the contrary, remained concealed behind them; but although the King knew Athos, Porthos, and Aramis personally, he passed before them without speaking or looking—indeed as if he had never seen them before. As for Treville, when the royal eyes fell upon him, he sustained the look with so much firmness, that it was the King who turned aside; after which his Majesty, grumbling, entered his apartment.

"Wait here ten minutes," said Treville; "and if, at the expiration of ten minutes, you do not see me come out, return to my house, for it will be useless for you to wait for me longer."

The four waited twenty minutes; and, seeing that Treville did not return, went away very uneasy.

M. de Treville entered the closet boldly, and found his Majesty in a very ill-humor, seated in an armchair, beating his boot with the whip handle; which, however, did not prevent his asking, with the greatest coolness, after his health.

"Bad! monsieur,—bad! I am tired out."

This was, in fact, the worst complaint of Louis XIII., who would sometimes take one of his courtiers to a window, and say, "Monsieur So-and-so, let us be weary together."

"How! your Majesty is becoming dull! Have you not enjoyed the pleasures of the chase to-day?"

"A fine pleasure, indeed, monsieur! Upon my soul, everything degenerates; and I shall be obliged to give up hunting, as I have given up hawking. Ah! I am an unfortunate king, M. de Treville! I had but one gerfalcon, and he died the day before yesterday."

"Indeed, sire, I enter into your annoyance perfectly; the misfortune is great; but I think you have still a good number of falcons, sparrow-hawks, and tiercets."

"And not a man to instruct them. Falconers are declining; I know no one but myself who is acquainted with the noble art of venery. After me it will be all over, and people will hunt with gins, snares, and traps. If I had but the time to form pupils! but there is M. le Cardinal always at hand, who does not leave me a moment's repose; who talks to me perpetually about Spain, Austria, or England! Ah! talking of the Cardinal, M. de Treville, I am vexed with you."

This was the place at which Treville waited for the King. He knew the King of old, and he knew that all these complaints were but a preface—a sort of exitation to encourage himself and that he had now come to his point at last.

"And in what have I been so unfortunate as to displease your Majesty?" asked Treville, feigning the most profound astonishment.

"Is it thus you perform your charge, monsieur?" continued the King, without directly replying to de Treville's question; "is it for this I name you Captain of my Musketeers, that they should assassinate a man, disturb a whole quarter, and endeavor to set fire to Paris, without your saying a word? But yet," continued the King, "without doubt, my hate accuses you wrongfully; without doubt the rioters are in prison, and you come to tell me justice is done."

"Sire," replied Treville, calmly, "I come to demand it of you."

"And against whom, pray?" cried the King.

"Against calumniators," said Treville.

"Ah! this is something new," replied the King.

"Will you tell me that your three confounded Musketeers, Athos, Porthos, and Aramis, and your cadet from Béarn, have not fallen, like so many furies, upon poor Bernajoux, and have not maltreated him in such a fashion that probably by this time he is dead? Will you tell me that they did not lay siege to the hotel of the Duke of la Tremouille, and that they did not

endeavor to burn it?—which would not, perhaps, have been a great misfortune in time of war, seeing that it is nothing but a nest of Hugenots; but which is, in time of peace, a frightful example. Tell me, now—can you deny all this?"

"And who has told you this fine story, sire?" asked Treville, quietly.

"Who has told me this fine story, monsieur? Who should it be but him who watches whilst I sleep, who labors whilst I amuse myself, who conducts everything at home and abroad—in Europe as well as in France?"

"Your Majesty must speak of God, without doubt," said Treville; "for I know no one but God that can be so far above your Majesty."

"No, monsieur; I speak of the prop of the state—of my only servant—of my old friend—of the Cardinal."

"His Eminence is not his Holiness, sire."

"What do you mean by that, monsieur."

"That it is only the Pope that is infallible, and that this infallibility does not extend to the Cardinals."

"You mean to say that he deceives me—you mean to say that he betrays me? You accuse him, then? Come, speak—confess freely that you accuse him!"

"No, sire; but I say that he deceives himself; I say that he is ill-informed; I say that he has hastily accused your Majesty's Musketeers, towards whom he is unjust, and that he has not obtained his information from good sources."

"The accusation comes from Tremouille,—the duke himself. What do you answer to that?"

"I might answer, sire, that he is too deeply interested in the question to be a very impartial evidence; but so far from that, sire, I know the Duke to be a loyal gentleman, and I refer the matter to him—but upon one condition, sire."

"What is that?"

"It is, that your Majesty will make him come here, will interrogate him yourself, without witnesses, and that I shall see your Majesty as soon as you have seen the Duke."

"What then! and you will be bound," cried the King, "by what Tremouille shall say?"

"Doubtless, I will."

"And you will submit to the reparation he may require?"

"Certainly."

"La Chesnaye!" cried the King.

Louis XIII.'s confidential valet de chambre, who never left the door, entered in reply to the call.

"La Chesnaye," said the King, "let some one go instantly and find my Lord de la Tremouille; I wish to speak with him this evening."

"Your Majesty gives me your word that you will not see any one between the duke and me?"

"Nobody—by the word of a gentleman."

"To-morrow then, sire?"

"To-morrow, as early as you like—at seven o'clock; but beware, if you and your Musketeers are guilty."

"If my Musketeers are guilty, sire, the guilty shall be placed in your Majesty's hands, who will dispose of them at your good pleasure. Does your Majesty require anything further? Speak, I am ready to obey."

"No, monsieur, no; I am not called Louis the Just without reason. To-morrow, then, monsieur—to-morrow."

"Till then, God preserve your Majesty."

However ill the King might sleep, M. de Treville slept still worse; he had ordered his three Musketeers and their companion to be with him at half-past six in the morning. He took them with him, without encouraging them or promising them anything, and without concealing from them that their favor, and even his own, depended upon this cast of the dice.

When arrived at the bottom of the back-stairs, he desired them to wait. If the King was still irritated against them, they would depart without being seen; if the King consented to see them, they would only have to be called.

On arriving at the King's private antechamber, M. de Treville found La Chesnaye, who informed him that they had not been able to find M. de la Tremouille on the preceding evening at his hotel, that he came in too late to present himself at the Louvre, that he had only that moment arrived, and that he was then with the King.

This circumstance pleased M. de Treville much, as he thus became certain that no foreign suggestion could insinuate itself between M. de la Tremouille's deposition and himself.

In fact, ten minutes had scarcely passed away, when the door of the King's closet opened, and M. de Treville saw M. de la Tremouille come out; the duke came straight up to him, and said:

"M. de Treville, his Majesty has just sent for me in order to inquire respecting the circumstances which took place yesterday at my hotel. I have told him the truth, that is to say, that the fault lay with my people, and that I was ready to offer you my excuses. Since I have the good fortune to meet you, I beg you to receive them, and to consider me always as one of your friends."

"My Lord Duke," said M. de Treville, "I was confident of your loyalty, that I required no other defender before his Majesty than yourself. I find that I have not been mistaken, and I am gratified to think that there is still one man in France of whom may be said, without disappointment, what I have said of you."

"That's well said," said the King, who had heard all these compliments through the open door; "only tell him, Treville, since he wishes to be considered as your friend, that I also wish to be one of his, but he neglects me; that it is nearly three years since I have seen him, and that I never do see him unless I send for him. Tell him all this for me, for these are things which a King cannot say himself."

"Thanks, sire, thanks," said Tremouille; "but your Majesty

may be assured that it is not those—I do not speak of M. de Treville—that it is not those whom your Majesty sees at all hours of the day that are the most devoted to you."

"Ah you heard what I said? so much the better, Duke, so much the better," said the King, advancing towards the door. "Ah! that's you, Treville. Where are your Musketeers? I told you the day before yesterday to bring them with you, why have you not done so?"

"They are below, sire, and with your permission La Chesnaye will tell them to come up."

"Yes, yes, let them come up immediately; it is nearly eight o'clock, and at nine I expect a visit. Go, monsieur le Duc, and return often. Come in, Treville."

The Duke bowed and retired. At the moment he opened the door, the three and d'Artagnan, conducted by La Chesnaye, appeared at the top of the staircase.

"Come in, my heroes," said the King, "come in; I am going to scold you."

The Musketeers advanced, bowing, d'Artagnan following closely behind them.

"How the devil!" continued the King, "seven of his Eminence's guards disabled by you four in two days! That's too many, gentlemen, too many! If you go on so, his Eminence will be forced to renew his company in three weeks, and I to put the edicts in force in all their rigor. One, now and then, I don't say much about; but seven in two days, I repeat, it is to many, far too many!"

"Therefore, sire, your Majesty sees that they are come quite contrite and repentant to offer you their excuses."

"Quite contrite and repentant! Hem!" said the King, "I place no confidence in their hypocritical faces; in particular, there is one yonder of a Gascon look. Come hither, Monsieur."

D'Artagnan, who understood that it was to him this compliment was addressed, approached, assuming a most deprecating air.

"Why, you told me he was a young man? This is a boy, Treville, a mere boy! Do you mean to say that it was he who bestowed that severe thrust upon Jussac? And those two equally fine thrusts upon Bernajoux?"

"Truly!"

"Without reckoning," said Athos, "and if he had not rescued me from Cahusac, I should not now have the honor of making my very humble reverences to your Majesty."

"Why, this Bearnais is a very devil! Ventre-saint-gris! Monsieur de Treville, as the King my father would have said. But at this sort of work, many doublets must be slashed and many swords broken. Now Gascons are always poor, are they not?"

"Sire, I can assert that they have hitherto discovered no gold mines in their mountains; though the Lord owes them this miracle in recompense of the manner in which they supported the pretensions of the King, your father."

"Which is to say, that the Gascons made a King of me, myself, seeing that I am my father's son, is it not, Treville? Well, in good faith, I don't say nay to it. La Chesnaye, go and see if, by rummaging in all my pockets, you can find forty pistoles; and if you can find them, bring them to me. And now, let us see, young man, with your hand upon your conscience, how did all this come to pass?"

D'Artagnan related the adventure of the preceding day in all its details: how, not having been able to sleep for the joy he felt in the expectation of seeing his Majesty, he had gone to his three friends three hours before the hour of audience; how they had gone together to the fives-court, and how, upon the fear he had manifested of receiving a ball in the face, he had been jeered at by Bernajoux, who had nearly paid for his jeer with his life, and Tremouille, who had nothing to do with the matter, with the loss of his mansion.

"This is all very well," murmured the King; "yes, this is just the account the Duke gave me of the affair. Poor Cardinal! seven men in two days, and those of his very best! but that's quite enough, gentlemen; please to understand that's enough: you have taken your revenge, for the Rue Ferou, and even exceeded it; you ought to be satisfied."

"If your Majesty is so," said Treville, "we are."

"Oh, yes, I am," added the King, taking a handful of gold from La Chesnaye, and putting it into the hand of d'Artagnan. "Here," said he, "is a proof of my satisfaction."

At this period, the ideas of pride which are in fashion in our days, did not yet prevail. A gentleman received, from hand to hand, money from the King, and was not the least in the world humiliated. D'Artagnan put his forty pistoles into his pocket without any scruple; on the contrary, thanking his Majesty greatly.

"There," said the King, looking at a clock, "there, now, as it is half-past eight, you may retire; for, as I told you, I expect some one at nine. Thanks for your devotedness, gentlemen. I may continue to rely upon it, may I not?"

"O, sire!" cried the four companions, with one voice, "we would allow ourselves to be cut to pieces in your Majesty's service!"

"Well, well, but keep whole: that will be better, and you will be more useful to me. Treville," added the King, in a low voice, as the others were retiring, "as you have no room in the Musketeers, and as we have besides decided that a novitiate is necessary before entering that corps, place this young man in the company of the guards of Desessarts, your brother-in-law. Ah! I enjoy beforehand the face the Cardinal will make; he will be furious! but I don't care; I am doing what is right."

And the King waved his hand to Treville, who left him and rejoined the Musketeers, whom he found sharing the forty pistoles with d'Artagnan.

And the Cardinal was really furious, so furious that during a

week he absented himself from the King's play-table, which did not prevent the King from being as complaisant to him as possible, or whenever he met him from asking in the kindest tone:

"Well, my lord Cardinal, how fares it with that poor Jussac, and that poor Bernajoux of yours?"

CHAPTER VII.

THE MUSKETEERS AT HOME.

When d'Artagnan was out of the Louvre, and consulted his friends upon the use he had best made of his share of the forty pistoles, Athos advised him to order a good repast, Porthos to engage a lackey, and Aramis to obtain a mistress.

The repast was carried into effect that very day, and the lackey waited at table. The repast had been ordered by Athos, and the lackey furnished by Porthos. He was a Picard, whom the glorious Musketeer had picked up on the bridge. Porthos had brought him away without any recommendation. The noble carriage of this gentleman, on whose account he believed himself to be engaged, had seduced Planchet—that was the name of the Picard. He felt a slight disappointment, however, when he saw that the place was already taken by a compeer named Mousqueton, and when Porthos signified to him that the state of his household, though great, would not support two servants, and that he must enter into the service of d'Artagnan, nevertheless, when he waited at the dinner given by his master, and saw him take out a handful of gold to pay for it, he believed his fortune made, and returned thanks to Heaven for having thrown him into the service of such a Crœsus; he preserved this opinion even after the feast, with the remnants of which he repaired his long abstinences. But when in the evening he made his master's bed, the chimeras of Planchet faded away. The bed was the only one in the apartments, which consisted of an antechamber and a bedroom. Planchet slept in the antechamber upon a coverlet taken from the bed of d'Artagnan, and which d'Artagnan from that time made shift without.

Athos, on his part, had a valet whom he had trained in his service in a perfectly peculiar fashion, and who was named Grimaud. He was very taciturn, this worthy signor. Be it understood we are speaking of Athos. During the five or six years that he had lived in the strictest intimacy with his companions, Porthos and Aramis, they could remember having often seen him smile, but never heard him laugh. His words were brief and expressive—conveying all that was meant—and no more, no embellishments, no embroidery, no arabesques. His conversation was in fact without any episodes.

Although Athos was scarcely thirty years old, and was of great personal beauty and intelligence of mind, no one knew that he had ever had a mistress. He never spoke of women. He certainly did not prevent others from speaking of them before

him, although it was easy to perceive that this kind of conversation, in which he only mingled by bitter words and misanthropic remarks, was perfectly disagreeable to him. His reserve, his roughness, and his silence made almost an old man of him; he had then, in order not to disturb his habits, accustomed Grimaud to obey him upon a simple gesture, or upon the mere movement of his lips. He never spoke to him but upon most extraordinary occasions.

Sometimes Grimaud, who feared his master as he did fire, whilst entertaining a strong attachment to his person, and a great veneration for his talents, believed he perfectly understood what he wanted, flew to execute the order received, and did precisely the contrary. Athos then shrugged his shoulders, and without putting himself in a passion, gave Grimaud a good thrashing. On these days he spoke a little.

Porthos, as we have seen, was a character exactly opposite to that of Athos; he not only talked much, but loudly, little caring whether anybody listened to him or not, for the pleasure of talking and hearing himself talk. He spoke upon all subjects except the sciences, alleging, in this respect, the inveterate hatred he had borne them from his childhood. He had not so noble an air as Athos, and the consciousness of his inferiority in this respect had, at the commencement of their intimacy, often rendered him unjust towards that gentleman, whom he endeavored to eclipse by his splendid dress. But with his simple Musketeer's uniform, and nothing but the manner in which he held his head and advanced his foot, Athos instantly took the place which was his due, and consigned the ostentatious Porthos to the second rank. Porthos consoled himself by filling the antechamber of Treville and the guard-room of the Louvre with the accounts of his armours, of which Athos never spoke, and at the present moment, after having passed from the lawyer's dame to the baroness, there was question of nothing less with Porthos than a foreign princess, who was enormously fond of him.

An old proverb says, "Like master like man." Let us pass then from the valet of Athos to the valet of Porthos, from Grimaud to Mousqueton.

Mousqueton was a Norman, whose pacific name of Boniface his master had changed into the infinitely more sonorous one of Mousqueton. He had entered Porthos's service upon condition that he should only be clothed and lodged, but in a handsome manner; he claimed but two hours a day to himself, to consecrate to an employment which would provide for his other wants. Porthos agreed to the bargain; the thing suited him wonderfully well. He had doublets for Mousqueton cut out of his old clothes and cast-off cloaks, and thanks to a very intelligent tailor, who made his clothes look as good as new by turning them, and whose wife was suspected of wishing to make Porthos descend from his aristocratic habits, Mousqueton made a very good figure when attending on his master.

As for Aramis, his lackey was called Bazin. Thanks to the hopes which his master entertained of some day entering into orders, he was always clothed in black, as became the servant of a churchman. This was a Berrichon of from thirty-five to forty years of age, mild, peaceable, sleek, employing the leisure his master left him in the perusal of pious works, providing rigorously for two a dinner of few dishes, but excellent. For the rest, he was dumb, blind, and deaf, and of unimpeachable fidelity.

And now that we are acquainted, superficially at least, with the masters and the valets, let us pass on to the dwellings occupied by each of them.

Athos dwelt in the Rue Ferou, within two steps of the Luxembourg; his apartments consisted of two small chambers, very nicely fitted up, in a furnished house, the hostess of which, still young, and still really handsome, cast tender glances uselessly at him. Some fragments of great past splendor appeared here and there upon the walls of this modest lodging; a sword, for example, richly damascened, which belonged by its make to the times of Francis I., the hilt of which alone, incrusted with precious stones, might be worth two hundred pistoles, and which, nevertheless, in his moments of greatest distress, Athos had never pledged or offered for sale. This sword had long been an object of ambition for Porthos. Porthos would have given ten years of his life to possess this sword.

One day, when he had an appointment with a duchess, he endeavored even to borrow it of Athos. Athos, without saying anything, emptied his pockets, got together all his jewels, purses, aiguillettes, and gold chains, and offered them all to Porthos; but as to the sword, he said it was sealed to its place, and should never quit it until its master should himself quit his lodgings. In addition to the sword there was a portrait representing a nobleman of the reign of Henry III., dressed with the greatest elegance, and who wore the order of the Holy Ghost; and this portrait had with Athos a family likeness, which indicated that this great noble, a knight of the royal orders, was his ancestor.

Besides these, a casket of magnificent goldsmith's work, with the same arms as the sword and the portrait, formed a middle ornament to the mantelpiece, which assorted badly with the rest of the furniture. Athos always carried the key of this coffer about him, but he one day opened it before Porthos, and Porthos was convinced that this coffer contained nothing but letters and papers—love letters and family papers, no doubt.

Porthos lived in apartments, large in size, and of a very sumptuous appearance, in the Rue du Vieux-Colombier. Every time he passed with a friend before his windows, at one of which Mousqueton was sure to be placed in full livery, Porthos raised his head and his hand, and said, "That is my abode!" But he was never to be found at home, he never invited anybody to go up with him, and no one could form an idea of what these sumptuous apartments contained in the shape of real riches.

As to Aramis, he dwelt in a little lodging composed of a boudoir, an eating-room and a bed-room, which room, situated as the others were, on the ground floor, looked out upon a little fresh green garden, shady and impenetrable to the eyes of his neighbors.

With regard to d'Artagnan we know how he was lodged, and we have already made acquaintance with his lackey, Master Planchet.

D'Artagnan, who was by nature very curious, as people generally are who possess the genius of intrigue, did all he could do make out who Athos, Porthos, and Aramis really were; for under these cloaks, each of these young men concealed his family name. Athos in particular, who savored of the noble a league off. He addressed himself then to Porthos, to gain information respecting Athos and Aramis, and to Aramis in order to learn something of Porthos.

Unfortunately Porthos knew nothing of the life of his silent companion but that which had transpired. It was said he had met with great crosses in an affair of the heart, and that a frightful treachery had forever poisoned the life of this gallant young man. What could this treachery be? All the world was ignorant of it.

As to Porthos, except his real name, which no one but M. de Treville was acquainted with, as well as with those of his two comrades, his life was very easily known. Vain and indiscreet, it was as easy to see through him as through a crystal.

The only thing to mislead the investigator would have been for him to believe all the good he said of himself.

With respect to Aramis, whilst having the air of having nothing secret about him, he was a young fellow made up of mysteries, answering little to questions put to him about others, and eluding those that concerned himself. One day, d'Artagnan, having for a long time interrogated him about Porthos, and having learned from him the report which prevailed concerning the Musketeer's amour with a princess, wished to gain a little insight into the amorous adventures of his interlocutor.

"And you, my dear companion," said he, "you who speak of the baronesses, countesses, and princesses of others?"

"Pardieu! I spoke of them because Porthos talked of them himself because he has cried all these fine things before me. But be assured, my dear d'Artagnan, that if I had obtained them from any other source or if they had been confided to me, there exists no confessor more discreet than I am."

"Oh! I don't doubt that," replied d'Artagnan; "but it seems to me that you are tolerably familiar with coats of arms, a certain embroidered handkerchief, for instance, to which I owe the honor of your acquaintance?"

This time Aramis was not angry, but assumed the most modest air, and replied in a friendly tone:

"My dear friend, do not forget that I wish to belong to the church, and that I avoid all mundane opportunities. The hand-

kerchief you saw had not been given to me but it had been forgotten and left at my house by one of my friends. I was obliged to pick it up in order to compromise him and the lady he loves. As for myself I neither have nor desire to have a mistress, following in that respect the very judicious example of Athos who has none any more than I have."

"But what the devil! you are not an abbe, you are a Musketeer!"

"A Musketeer for a time, my friend, as the Cardinal says a Musketeer against my will, but a Churchman at heart, believe me. Athos and Porthos dragged me into this to occupy me. I had, at the moment of being ordained, a little difficulty with—but that would not interest you, and I am taking up your valuable time."

"Oh! not at all; it interests me very much," cried d'Artagnan, "and at this moment, I have absolutely nothing to do."

"Yes, but I have my breviary to repeat," answered Aramis; "then some verses to compose, which Mme. d'Aiguillon begged of me. Then I must go to the Rue St. Honore, in order to purchase some rouge for Mme. de Chevreuse; so you see, my dear friend, that if you are not in a hurry, I am."

And Aramis held out his hand in a cordial manner to his young companion, and took leave of him.

Notwithstanding all the pains he took, d'Artagnan was unable to learn any more concerning his young friends. He formed therefore, the resolution of believing in the present all that was said of their past, hoping for more certain and extended revelations from the future. In the meanwhile, he looked upon Athos as an Achilles, Porthos as an Ajax, and Aramis as a Joseph.

As to the rest, the life of our four young friends was joyous enough. Athos played, and that generally unfortunately. Nevertheless, he never borrowed of his companions, although his purse was ever at their service; and when he had played upon honor, he always awakened his creditor by six o'clock the next morning, to pay the debt of the preceding evening.

Porthos played by fits and starts; on the days he won he was insolent and ostentatious; if he lost, he disappeared completely for several days, after which he reappeared with a pale face and thinner person, but with money in his purse.

As to Aramis, he never gambled. He was the worst soldier and the most unconvivial companion imaginable. He had always something or other to do. Sometimes, in the midst of dinner, when every one, under the attraction of wine and in the warmth of conversation, believed they had two or three hours longer to enjoy themselves at table, Aramis looked at his watch, arose with a bland smile, and took leave of the company, to go, as he said, to consult a causist with whom he had an appointment. At other times he would return home to write a treatise, and requested his friends not to disturb him.

At this Athos would smile, with his charming, melancholy smile, which so became his noble countenance, and Porthos would

drink, swearing that Aramis would never be anything but a village priest.

Planchet, d'Artagnan's valet, supported his good fortune nobly; he received thirty sous per day, and during a month he returned home gay as a chaffinch, and affable towards his master. When the wind of adversity began to blow upon the house-keeping of Rue des Fossoyeurs, that is to say, when the forty pistoles were consumed, or nearly so, he commenced complaints which Athos thought nauseous, Porthos unseemly, and Aramis ridiculous. Athos advised d'Artagnan to dismiss the fellow, but Porthos was of opinion that he should give him a good thrashing first, and d'Artagnan, after having well beaten Planchet, forbade him to leave his service without his permission; "for," added he, "the future cannot fail to mend; I inevitably look for better times. Your fortune is therefore made if you remain with me, and I am too good a master to allow you to miss such a chance by granting you the dismissal you require."

This manner of acting created much respect for d'Artagnan's policy among the Musketeers. Planchet was equally seized with admiration, and said no more about going away.

The life of the four young men had become common; d'Artagnan, who had no settled habits of his own, as he came from his province into a world quite new to him, fell easily into the habits of his friends.

In the meanwhile the promises of M. de Treville went on prosperously. One fine morning the King commanded M. le Chevalier Desessarts to admit d'Artagnan as a cadet in his company of guards. D'Artagnan, with a sigh, donned this uniform, which he would have exchanged for a Musketeer's at the expense of ten years of his existence. But M. de Treville promised this favor after a novitiate of two years, which might besides, be abridged if an opportunity should present itself for d'Artagnan to render the King any signal service, or to distinguish himself by some brilliant action. Upon this promise d'Artagnan retired, and the next day entered upon his duties.

Then it became the turn of Athos, Porthos, and Aramis to mount guard with d'Artagnan, when he was on duty. By admitting d'Artagnan, the company of Chevalier Desessarts received four men instead of one.

CHAPTER VIII.

A COURT INTRIGUE.

In the meantime, the forty pistoles of King Louis XIII., like all other things of this world, after having had a beginning had an end, and after this end our four companions began to be somewhat embarrassed. At first Athos supported the association for a time with his own means. Porthos succeeded him, and thanks to one of these disappearances to which he was accustomed, he was able to provide for the wants of all for a fort-

night; at last it became Aramis's turn, who performed it with a good grace, and who succeeded, as he said, by selling some theological books, in procuring a few pistoles.

They then, as they had been accustomed to do, had recourse to M. de Treville, who made some advances on their pay; but these advances could not go far with the three Musketeers, who were already much in arrears, and a guard who as yet had no pay at all.

At length, when they found they were likely to be quite in want, they got together, as a last effort, eight or ten pistoles, with which Porthos went to the gaming-table. Unfortunately he was in a bad vein; he lost all, together with twenty-five pistoles upon his parole.

D'Artagnan fancied himself a burden to the society, forgetting in his perfectly juvenile good faith, that he had fed this society for a month, and he set his mind actively to work. He reflected that this coalition of four young, brave, enterprising, and active men ought to have some other object than swaggering walks, fencing lessons, and practical jokes, more or less sensible.

He was thinking alone, and seriously racking his brain to find a direction for this single force four times multiplied, with which he did not doubt, as with the lever for which Archimedes sought, they should succeed in moving the world, when some one tapped gently at his door. D'Artagnan awakened Planchet and desired him to go and see who was there.

Let not the reader, from this phrase—"d'Artagnan awakened Planchet," suppose that it was night, or that the day was not yet come. No, it had just struck four. Planchet, two hours before, had asked his master for some dinner, and he had answered him with the proverb, "He who sleeps dines." And Planchet dined sleeping.

A man was introduced of a common mien, with the appearance of a tradesman.

D'Artagnan dismissed Planchet, and requested his visitor to be seated.

There was a moment of silence, during which the two men looked at each other, as if to make a preliminary acquaintance, after which d'Artagnan bowed as a sign that he was attentive.

"I have heard speak of M. d'Artagnan as of a very brave young man," said the bourgeois, "and this reputation, which he justly enjoys, has determined me to confide a secret to him. I have a wife who is seamstress to the Queen, monsieur, and who is not deficient in either good conduct or beauty. I was induced to marry her, about three years ago, although she had but very little dowry, because M. Laporte, the Queen's cloak-bearer, is her godfather, and patronizes her. Well! my wife was carried off, yesterday morning, as she was coming out of her work-room. I suspect a man who pursued her a long time ago."

"The devil!"

"But allow me to tell you," continued the citizen, "that I believe that love has nothing to do with the carrying off of my

wife, as regards herself, but that it has been done on account of the amours of a much greater lady than she is."

"Ah! ah! can it be on account of the amours of Madame de Bois-Tracy?" said d'Artagnan, wishing to have the air, in the eyes of the bourgeois, of being acquainted with the affairs of the court.

"Higher; much higher!"

"Of the Queen——?" d'Artagnan stopped.

"Yes, monsieur," replied the terrified bourgeois, in a tone so low that it was scarcely audible.

"And with whom?"

"With whom can it be, if not with the Duke of ——?"

"The Duke of ——?"

"Yes," replied the bourgeois, giving a still lower intonation to his voice, "I know it from my wife, monsieur—from my wife herself."

"Who knows it—she herself—from whom?"

"From M. Laporte. Did I not tell you that she was the god-daughter of M. Laporte, the confidential man of the Queen? Well, M. Laporte placed her near her Majesty, in order that our poor Queen might at least have some one in whom she could place confidence, abandoned as she is by the King, watched as she is by the Cardinal, betrayed as she is by everybody."

"Ah! ah! it begins to develop itself," said d'Artagnan.

"Now my wife came home four days ago, monsieur; one of her conditions was that she should come and see me twice a week; for, as I had the honor to tell you, my wife loves me dearly; my wife, then, came and confided to me that the Queen, at this very moment entertained great fears. The Cardinal, as it appears, pursues her and persecutes her more than ever. And the Queen believes that some one has written to the Duke of Buckingham in her name to make him come to Paris and when once come to Paris, to draw him into some snare."

"The devil! But your wife, monsieur, what has she to do with all this?"

"Her devotion to the Queen is known, and they wish either to remove her from her mistress, or to intimidate her, in order to obtain her Majesty's secrets, or to seduce her and make use of her as a spy."

"That is all very probable," said d'Artagnan; "but the man who has carried her off,—do you know him?"

"I have told you that I believe I know him. He is a creature of the Cardinal's, his other self."

"But have you seen him?"

"Yes, my wife pointed him out to me one day."

"Has he anything remarkable about him, by which he may be recognized?"

"Oh! certainly; he is a noble of very lofty carriage, black hair, a swarthy complexion, piercing eye, white teeth, and a scar on his temple."

"A scar on his temple!" cried d'Artagnan; "and with that,

white teeth, a piercing eye, dark complexion, black hair, and haughty carriage; why, that's my man of Meung."

"He is your man, do you say?"

"Yes, yes; but that has nothing to do with it. No, I am mistaken that simplifies the matter, greatly; on the contrary, if your man is mine, with one blow I shall obtain two revenges, that's all; but where is this man to be met with?"

"I cannot inform you."

"Have you no information respecting his dwelling?"

"None; one day, as I was conveying my wife back to the Louvre, he was coming out as she was going in, and she showed him to me."

"The devil! the devil!" murmured d'Artagnan; "all this is vague enough; from whom did you learn the abduction of your wife?"

"From M. Laporte."

"Did he give you any of the particulars?"

"He knew none himself. But I have received——"

"What? I beg leave to observe to you this time that it is too late now to retreat."

"I do not retreat!" cried the bourgeois, swearing to keep his courage up. "Besides, by the word of Bonacieux——"

"Your name is Bonacieux?" interrupted d'Artagnan. "Pardon me for interrupting you, but it appears to me that that name is familiar to me."

"Very possibly. I am your landlord."

"Ah! ah!" said d'Artagnan, half rising and bowing; "you are my landlord?"

"Yes, monsieur, yes. And as it is three months since you came, and engaged as you must be in your important occupations, you have forgotten to pay me my rent; as I say, I have not tormented you a single instant, I thought you would appreciate my delicacy."

"How can it be otherwise, my dear Bonacieux?" replied d'Artagnan; "trust me, I am fully grateful for such conduct, and if, as I have told you, I can be of any service to you——"

"I believe you, monsieur, I believe you; and as I was about to say, by the word of Bonacieux! I have confidence in you."

"Finish, then, that which you were about to say."

The bourgeois took a paper from his pocket, and presented it to d'Artagnan.

"A letter?" said the young man.

"Which I received this morning."

D'Artagnan opened it, and as the day was beginning to decline, he drew near to the window to read it, and the bourgeois followed him.

"'Do not seek for your wife,'" read d'Artagnan; "'she will be restored to you when there is no longer occasion for her. If you make a single step to find her you are lost.'"

"That's pretty positive," continued d'Artagnan; "but, after all, it is but a threat."

"Yes; but that threat terrifies me. I am not a man of the sword at all, monsieur; and I am afraid of the Bastile."

"Hum!" said d'Artagnan. "I have no greater regard for the Bastile than you. If it were nothing but a sword-thrust——"

"Seeing you constantly surrounded by Musketeers of a very superb appearance, and knowing that these Musketeers belonged to M. de Treville, and were consequently enemies of the Cardinal, I thought that you and your friends, whilst rendering justice to our poor Queen, would not be displeased at having an opportunity of giving his Eminence an ill-turn."

"Without doubt."

"And then I thought that owing me three months' rent, which I have said nothing about—reckoning still further, that as long as you do me the honor to remain in my house, that I shall never mention your future rent."

"Very kind!"

"And adding to this, if there be need of it, meaning to offer you fifty pistoles, if, against all probability, you should be short at the present moment."

"Admirable! but you are rich then, my dear M. Bonacieux?"

"I am comfortably off, that's all: I have scraped together some such thing as an income of two or three thousand crowns in the mercery business, but more particularly in venturing some funds in the last voyage of the celebrated navigator, Jean Moquet: so that you understand——But!" cried the bourgeois.

"What?" demanded d'Artagnan.

"Whom do I see yonder?"

"Where?"

"In the street, fronting your window, in the recess of that door; a man in a cloak."

"It is he!" cried d'Artagnan and the tradesman at the same time, having each recognized his man.

"Ah! this time," cried d'Artagnan, springing to his sword, "this time he does not escape me!"

Drawing his sword from the sheath, he rushed out of the apartment.

On the staircase he met Athos and Porthos, who were coming to see him. They separated, and d'Artagnan rushed between them like lightning.

"Where the devil are you going?" cried the two in a breath.

"The man of Meung!" replied d'Artagnan, and disappeared.

D'Artagnan had more than once related to his friends his adventure with the unknown, as well as the apparition of the beautiful foreigner to whom this man had confided some important missive.

The opinion of Athos was that d'Artagnan had lost his letter in the skirmish. A gentleman, in his opinion, and according to d'Artagnan's portrait of him the unknown must be a gentleman, one would be incapable of the baseness of stealing a letter.

Porthos saw nothing in all this but a love-meeting, given by

a lady to a cavalier, or by a cavalier to a lady, which had been disturbed by the presence of d'Artagnan and his yellow horse.

Aramis said that as these sorts of affairs were mysterious, it was better not to attempt to unravel them.

They understood then, from the few words which escaped from d'Artagnan, what affair was in hand, and as they thought that after having overtaken his man, or lost sight of him, d'Artagnan would return to his rooms again, they went in.

When they entered d'Artagnan's chamber it was empty; the landlord, dreading the consequences of the meeting which was doubtless about to take place between the young man and the unknown, had, consistently with the character he had given himself, judged it most prudent to decamp.

CHAPTER IX.

D'ARTAGNAN BEGINS TO DEVELOP HIMSELF.

As Athos and Porthos had foreseen, at the expiration of half an hour d'Artagnan returned. He had this time again missed his man, who had disappeared as if by enchantment.

Whilst d'Artagnan was running through the streets and knocking at doors, Aramis had joined his companions, so that on returning home d'Artagnan found the meeting complete. "Well!" cried the three Musketeers all together, on seeing d'Artagnan enter with his brow covered with perspiration, and his face clouded with anger.

"Well!" cried he, throwing his sword upon the bed; "this man must be the devil in person; born for my damnation, for his flight has caused us to miss a glorious affair, gentlemen, an affair by which there were a hundred pistoles, and perhaps more to be gained."

He then related to his friends, word for word, all that had passed between him and his landlord, and how the man who had carried off the wife of his worthy landlord was the same with whom he had had a difference at the inn.

"Your affair is not a bad one," said Athos, "and fifty or sixty pistoles may be got out of this good man. Then, there only remains to ascertain whether these fifty or sixty pistoles are worth the risk of four heads."

"But please to observe," cried d'Artagnan, "that there is a woman in the affair, a woman carried off, a woman who is doubtless threatened, tortured perhaps, and all because she is faithful to her mistress."

"Beware, d'Artagnan, beware," cried Aramis, "you grow a little too warm, in my opinion, about the fate of Madam Bonacieux. Woman was created for our destruction, and it is from her we inherit all our miseries."

At this speech of Aramis the brow of Athos became clouded, and he bit his lips.

"It is not Madame Bonacieux about whom I am anxious,"

cried d'Artagnan, "but the Queen, whom the King abandons, whom the Cardinal persecutes, and who sees the heads of all her friends fall one after the other."

"Why does she love what we hate most in the world, the Spaniards and the English?"

"Spain is her country," replied d'Artagnan; "and it is very natural that she should love the Spanish, who are the children of the same soil as herself. As to the second reproach, I have heard her say that she does not love the English, but an Englishman. Which would not prevent me," said d'Artagnan, "if I knew where the Duke of Buckingham was, to take him by the hand and conduct him to the Queen, were it only to enrage the Cardinal; for our true, our only, our eternal enemy, gentlemen, is he, and if we could find means to play him a bad turn, I confess that I would voluntarily risk my head in doing it."

"And did the mercer," rejoined Athos, "tell you, d'Artagnan, that the Queen thought that Buckingham had been brought over by a forged letter?"

"She is afraid so."

"Wait a minute, then," said Aramis. "I am endeavoring to remember some circumstances."

"And now I am convinced," said d'Artagnan, "that this abduction of the Queen's woman is connected with the events of which we are speaking; and perhaps with the presence of the Duke of Buckingham at Paris."

"The Gascon is full of ideas," said Porthos, with admiration.

"I like to hear him talk," said Athos, "his prattle amuses me."

"Gentlemen," cried Aramis, "listen to this. "Yesterday I was at the house of a doctor of theology whom I sometimes consult about my studies. He resides in a quiet quarter," continued Aramis: "his tastes and his profession require it. Now, at the moment that I left his house——"

Here Aramis stopped.

"Well," cried his three auditors; "at the moment you left his house?"

Aramis appeared to be making a strong inward effort, like a man who, in the full relation of a falsehood, finds himself stopped by some unforeseen obstacle; but the eyes of his three companions were fixed upon him, their ears were wide open, and there were no means of retreating.

"This doctor has a niece," continued Aramis.

"A niece! has he?" said Porthos.

"A very respectable lady," said Aramis.

The three friends burst into a loud laugh.

"Ah! if you laugh, or doubt what I say," replied Aramis, "you shall know nothing."

"We are as staunch believers as Mahometans, and as mute as catafalques," said Athos.

"I will go on then," resumed Aramis. "This niece comes sometimes to see her uncle; and by chance, was there yesterday

at the same time that I was, and I could do no less than offer to conduct her to her carriage."

"Oh! oh! Then this niece of the doctor's keeps a carriage, does she?" interrupted Porthos, one of whose faults was a great incontinence of tongue; "a very nice acquaintance, my friend!"

"Porthos," replied Aramis, "I have had occasion to observe to you, more than once, that you are very indiscreet; and that is injurious to you among the women."

"Gentlemen, gentlemen," cried d'Artagnan, who began to get a glimpse of the result of the adventure, "the thing is serious; endeavor, then, not to joke, if possible. Go on, Aramis, go on."

"All at once, a tall, dark gentleman—just like yours, d'Artagnan——"

"The same, perhaps," said he.

"Possibly," continued Aramis,—"came towards me, accompanied by five or six men, who followed at about ten paces behind him; and, in the politest tone, 'Duke,' said he to me, 'and you, madame,' continued he, addressing the lady, who had hold of my arm,—"

"The doctor's niece?"

"Hold your tongue, Porthos," said Athos; "you are insupportable."

"'Be so kind as to get into this carriage; and that without offering the slightest resistance, or making the least noise.'"

"He took you for Buckingham!" cried d'Artagnan.

"I believe so," replied Aramis.

"But the lady?" asked Porthos.

"He took her for the Queen!" said d'Artagnan.

"Just so," replied Aramis.

"The Gascon is the devil!" cried Athos; "nothing escapes him."

"Gentlemen, gentlemen," said d'Artagnan, "do not let us lose our time in jesting; let us separate, and let us seek the mercer's wife—the key of the intrigue."

"A woman of such inferior condition! can you believe so?" said Porthos, protruding his lips with contempt.

"She is goddaughter to Laporte, the confidential valet to the Queen. Have I not told you so, gentlemen? Besides, it has perhaps been a scheme of her Majesty's to have sought, on this occasion, for support so lowly. High heads expose themselves sometimes; and the Cardinal is far-sighted."

"Well," said Porthos, "in the first place make a bargain with the mercer; and a good bargain, too."

"That's useless," said d'Artagnan; "for I believe if he does not pay us, we shall be well paid by another party."

At this moment a sudden noise of footsteps was heard upon the stairs, the door was thrown violently open, and the unfortunate mercer rushed into the chamber.

"Save me! gentlemen!" cried he. "There are four men come to arrest me; for the love of heaven, save me!"

Porthos and Aramis arose.

"A moment," cried d'Artagnan, making them a sign to replace their half-drawn swords: "on this occasion we don't require courage; but must exercise prudence."

"And yet," cried Porthos, "we will not allow——"

"Leave d'Artagnan to act as he thinks proper; he has, I repeat, the longest head of the four, and for my part, I declare I obey him. Do as you think best, d'Artagnan."

At this moment the four guards appeared at the door of the antechamber, but seeing four Musketeers standing, and their swords by their sides, they hesitated to advance further.

"Come in, gentlemen, come in; you are here in my rooms, and we are all faithful servants of the King and Cardinal."

"Then, gentlemen, you will not oppose our executing the orders we have received?" asked the one who appeared to be the leader of the party.

"On the contrary, we would assist you if it were necessary. You are at liberty to take away this man!"

And d'Artagnan pushed the half-stupefied mercer among the guards saying to him—

"You are a shabby old fellow, my dear sir! you come to demand rent-money of me! of a Musketeer!—to prison with him—gentlemen, once more, take him to prison, and keep him under key as long as possible—that will give me time to pay him."

The *sbirri* were full of thanks, and took away their prey.

"Why, what a devil of a villainy have you performed there," said Porthos, when the alguazil-in-chief had rejoined his companions, and the four friends were left alone. Shame! Shame! for four officers to allow an unfortunate devil who cried out for help to be arrested from amongst them."

"Porthos," said Aramis, "Athos has already told you, you are a simpleton, and I am quite of his opinion. D'Artagnan, you are a great man, and when you occupy Captain Treville's place I will come and ask your influence to secure me an abbey."

"Well! I am quite lost!" said Porthos, "do *you* approve of what d'Artagnan has done?"

"Of course! indeed I do?" said Athos, "I not only approve of what he has done, but I congratulate him upon it."

"And now, gentleman," said d'Artagnan, without stopping to explain his conduct to Porthos—"all for one, one for all, that is our devise, is it not? That's well! Now let every one retire to his own home" said d'Artagnan, as if he had done nothing but command all his life—"and take heed! for from this moment we are at war with the Cardinal."

CHAPTER X.

POLICE MOUSE-TRAP.

The invention of the mouse-trap does not date from our days; as soon as societies, in forming, had invented any kind of police, that police in its turn invented mouse-traps.

As perhaps our readers are not familiar with police slang, allow us to explain to them what a mouse-trap is.

When in a house, of whatever kind it may be, an individual suspected of any crime be arrested, the arrest is held secret; four or five officers are placed in ambuscade in the first apartment, the door is opened to all that knock, it is closed after them, and they are arrested; so that at the end of two or three days they have in their power almost all the familiars of the establishment. And that is a mouse-trap.

The apartment of Master Bonacieux then became a mouse-trap, and whoever appeared there was taken and interrogated by the Cardinal's people.

On the evening of the day after the arrest of poor Bonacieux, as Athos had just left d'Artagnan, to go to M. de Treville's as nine o'clock had just struck, and as Planchet, who had not yet made the bed, was beginning his task, a knocking was heard at the street-door; the door was instantly opened and shut; some one was taken into the mouse-trap.

D'Artagnan flew to his hole, and laid himself down on the floor at full length to listen.

Cries were soon heard, and then moans, which some one appeared to be endeavoring to stifle. There were no interrogatories.

"The devil!" said d'Artagnan to himself, "it's a woman—they are searching her—she resists—they use force—the scoundrels!"

In spite of all his prudence, d'Artagnan restrained himself with great difficulty from taking a part in the scene that was going on below.

"But I tell you that I am the mistress of the house, gentlemen! I tell you I am Mme. Bonacieux—I tell you I belong to the Queen!" said the unfortunate woman.

"Mme. Bonacieux!" murmured d'Artagnan; "can I have been so lucky as to have found what everybody is seeking for?"

The voice became more and more indistinct, a tumultuous movement shook the wainscoting. The victim resisted as much as a woman could resist four men.

"Pardon, gentlemen—par—" murmured the voice, which could now be only heard in inarticulate sounds.

"They are binding her, they are going to drag her away," cried d'Artagnan to himself, springing up from the floor. "My sword! good, it is by my side. Planchet! Run and seek Athos, Porthos, and Aramis. Two of the three will certainly be at home, perhaps all three. Tell them to arm, to come here, and be quick! Ah! I remember, Athos is at Treville's."

"But where are you going, master, where are you going?"

"I am going down by the window, in order to be there the sooner," cried d'Artagnan "on your part, put back the boards, sweep the floor, go out at the door, and run where I bid you."

"Oh! you will kill yourself," cried Planchet.

"Hold your tongue, you stupid fellow," said d'Artagnan, and laying hold of the window-frame, he let himself gently down,

and the height not being great, he did not sustain the least injury.

He then went straight to the door and knocked, murmuring:

"I will go myself and be caught in the mouse-trap, but woe be to the cats that shall pounce upon such a mouse!"

The knocker had scarcely sounded under the hand of the young man than the tumult ceased, steps approached, the door opened, and d'Artagnan, sword in hand, rushed into the apartments of Bonacieux, the door of which, doubtless, acted upon by a spring, closed after him.

Then those who dwelt in Bonacieux's unfortunate house, together with the nearest neighbors, heard loud screams, stamping of feet, clashing of swords and breaking of furniture. Then, a moment after, such as, surprised by this tumult, had gone to the windows to learn the cause, could see the door open, and four men, clothed in black, not come out of it, but fly, like so many frightened crows, leaving on the ground, and on the corners of the furniture, feathers from their wings; that is to say, portions of their clothes and fragments of their cloaks.

D'Artagnan was conquerer without much trouble, it must be confessed, for only one of the alguazils was armed, and defended himself for form's sake.

On being left alone with Madame Bonacieux, d'Artagnan turned towards her; the poor woman reclined, where she had been left, upon an arm-chair, in an half-fainting state. D'Artagnan examined her with a rapid but an earnest glance.

She was a charming woman, of about twenty-five, with dark hair, blue eyes, and a nose slightly turned up, admirable teeth, and a complexion marbled with rose and opal. There, however, stopped the signs which might have confounded her with a lady of rank. Her hands were white, but without delicacy; the feet did not bespeak the woman of quality. Fortunately, d'Artagnan was as yet not acquainted with such niceties.

Whilst d'Artagnan was examining Mme. Bonacieux, he saw on the ground a fine cambric handkerchief, which he mechanically picked up. At the corner he recognized the same cipher seen on the handkerchief which had nearly caused him and Aramis to cut each other's throats.

From that time d'Artagnan had been cautious with respect to handkerchiefs with arms on them, and he therefore placed the one he had just picked up in Mme. Bonacieux's pocket.

At that moment she recovered her senses. She opened her eyes looked around her with terror, saw that the apartment was empty, and that she was alone with her liberator. She immediately held out her hand to him with a smile—the sweetest smile in the world!

"Ah!" said she, "you have saved me; permit me to thank you."

"Madam," said d'Artagnan, "I have only done what every gentleman would have done in my place—you owe me no thanks."

"Oh! yes, oh! yes; and I hope to prove to you that you have not served an ingrate. But what could these men, whom I at first took for robbers, want with me, and why is M. Bonacieux not here?"

"Madam, these men were much more dangerous than any robbers could have been, for they are the agents of the Cardinal and as to your husband, M. Bonacieux, he is not here, because he was yesterday evening taken away to the Bastile."

"My husband in the Bastile?" cried Mme. Bonacieux. "Oh! good God! what can he have done? Poor, dear man! he is innocence itself!"

And something like a faint smile glided over the still terrified features of the young woman.

"What has he done, madame?" said d'Artagnan. "I believe that his only crime is to have at the same time the good fortune and the misfortune to be your husband."

"But, Monsieur, you know then——"

"I know that you were carried off, madame, by a man of forty or forty-five, with black hair, a dark complexion, and a scar on his left temple."

"That is he, that is he; but his name?"

"Ah! his name? I do not know that."

"And did my husband know I had been carried off?"

"He was informed of it by a letter written to him by the ravisher himself."

"And does he suspect," said Mme. Bonacieux, with some embarrassment, "the cause of this event?"

"He attributed it, I believe, to a political cause."

"I suspected so myself at first, and now I think entirely as he does. My dear M. Bonacieux has not then for an instant suspected me?"

"So far from it, madame, he was too proud of your prudence, and particularly of your love."

A second smile stole almost imperceptibly over the rosy lips of the pretty young woman.

"But," continued d'Artagnan, "how did you escape?"

"I took advantage of a moment at which they left me alone; and as I knew from this morning what to think of my abduction, with the help of the sheets, I let myself down from the window; then, as I concluded my husband would be at home, I hastened hither."

"To place yourself under his protection?"

"Oh! no, poor dear man! I knew very well that he was incapable of defending me; but, as he could be otherwise useful to us, I wished to inform him."

"Of what?"

"Oh! that is not my secret; I must not, therefore, tell you."

"Besides," said d'Artagnan, "(pardon me, madame, if, a soldier as I am, I remind you of prudence)—besides, I believe we are not here in a very proper place for imparting confidences. The men I have put to flight will return reinforced; if they find

us here, we are lost. I have sent for three of my friends, but who knows whether they may be at home."

"Yes! yes! you are right," cried the terrified Mme. Bonacieux; "let us fly! let us save ourselves."

At these words she passed her arm under that of d'Artagnan and pulled him forward, eagerly.

"But whither shall we fly?—whither escape to?"

"Let us in the first place get away from this house; when clear of it we shall see."

And the young woman and the young man, without taking the trouble to shut the door after them, descended the street rapidly, turned into the next, and did not stop till they came to Saint-Sulpice Square.

"And now, what are we to do, and whither do you wish me to conduct you?" asked d'Artagnan.

"I am quite at a loss how to answer you, I confess," said Madame Bonacieux; "my intention was to inform M. Laporte by means of my husband, in order that M. Laporte might tell us exactly what has taken place at the Louvre in the last three days, and whether there were any danger in presenting myself."

"But, I" said d'Artagnan, "can go and inform M. Laporte."

"No doubt you could; only there is one drawback to it, and that is that M. Bonacieux is known at the Louvre, and would be allowed to pass; whereas you are not known, and the gate would be closed against you."

"Pooh!" said d'Artagnan; "there is no doubt you have at some wicket of the Louvre a janitor devoted to you, and who, thanks to a password, would——"

Madame Bonacieux looked earnestly at the young man.

"And if I give you this password," said she, "would you forget it as soon as you had made use of it?"

"By the faith of a gentleman!" said d'Artagnan, with an accent so truthful, no one could mistake it.

"Then, I believe you; you appear to be a brave young man; besides, your fortune, perhaps, is at the end of your devotedness."

"I will do, without a promise, and voluntarily, all that I can do to serve the King and be agreeable to the Queen: dispose of me, then as a friend. Stop," said d'Artagnan; "we are near Athos's door. Yes, here it is."

"Who is this Athos?"

"One of my friends. He is not at home, and I will carry away the key, after having placed you in his apartment."

As d'Artagnan had foreseen, Athos was not at home; he took the key, which was customarily given him as one of the family, ascended the stairs, and introduced Mme. Bonacieux into the little apartment.

"Here, make yourself at home," said he; "wait here, fasten the door within, and open it to nobody unless you hear three taps like these;" and he tapped thrice; "two taps close together

and pretty hard, the other at a considerable distance and more light."

"That is all well," said Mme. Bonacieux; "now, in my turn, let me give you my orders. Present yourself at the wicket of the Louvre, on the side of the Rue de l'Echelle, and ask for Germain. He will ask you what you want, and you will answer by these two words—Tours and Bruxelles. He will immediately be at your command."

"Order him to go and fetch M. Laporte, the Queen's valet whom you will send to me."

"That is all very well; but where and how shall I see you again?"

"Well, let that care be mine, and be at ease."

D'Artagnan bowed to Mme. Bonacieux, darting at her the most loving glance that he could possibly concentrate upon her charming little person; and whilst he descended the stairs, he heard the door closed and double-locked.

Everything fell out as Mme. Bonacieux said it would. On hearing the password, Germain bowed: in a few minutes Laporte was at the lodge; in two words d'Artagnan informed him where Mme. Bonacieux was. Laporte assured himself, by having it twice repeated, of the exact address, and set off at a run.

He had, however, scarcely got ten steps before he returned.

"Young man," said he to d'Artagnan, "I have a piece of advice to give you. You may get into trouble by what has taken place. Have you any friend whose clock is too slow? Go and call upon him, in order that he may give evidence of your having been with him at half-past nine. In court of justice, that is called an *alibi.*"

D'Artagnan found this advice prudent; he took to his heels and was soon at M. de Treville's.

CHAPTER XI.

THE PLOT THICKENS.

His visit to Treville's being paid, d'Artagnan took his pensive but longest way homewards.

On what was d'Artagnan thinking, that he strayed thus from his path, gazing at the stars in the heavens, and sometimes sighing, sometimes smiling?

He was thinking of Mme. Bonacieux. For an apprentice Musketeer, the young woman was almost a loving ideality. Pretty, mysterious, initiated in almost all the secrets of the court, which spread such a charming gravity over her pleasing features, she was suspected of not being insensible, which is an irresistible charm of novices in love of the other sex; till further, d'Artagnan had delivered her from the hands of the demons who wished to search and ill-treat her; and this important service had established between them one of those sentiments of gratitude which so easily take another character.

As d'Artagnan, addressing himself to the beautiful night, and smiling at the stars, found himself in the quarter in which Aramis lived, he took it into his head to pay his friend a visit, in order to explain to him why he had sent Planchet to him, with a request that he would come instantly to the Mouse-trap. Now, if Aramis was at home when Planchet came to his abode, he had doubtless hastened to the Rue des Fossoyeurs, and finding nobody there but his two other companions, perhaps they would not be able to conceive what all this meant. This mystery required an explanation; at least, so d'Artagnan thought.

D'Artagnan had just passed the Rue Cassette, and already perceived the door of his friend's house, shaded by a mass of sycamores and clematis, which formed a vast arch opposite the front of it, when he perceived a shadow issuing from the Rue Servandoni. This shadow was enveloped in a cloak, and d'Artagnan at first believed it was a man; but by the smallness of the form, the hesitation of the progress, and the indecision of the step, he soon discovered that it was a woman. Further, this woman, as if not certain of the house she was seeking, lifted up her eyes to look around her, stopped, went a little back, and then returned again. D'Artagnan was perplexed.

"If I were to go and offer her my services!" thought he. "By her step she must be young, perhaps pretty. Oh! yes. But a woman who wanders about the streets at this hour seldom does so but to meet her lover. To go and disturb an assignation would not be the best means of commencing an acquaintance."

The young woman, however, continued advancing slowly, counting the houses and windows. This was neither a long nor a difficult affair; there were but three hotels, in this part of the street, two windows looking out upon that street, and one of them was that of a pavilion parallel to that which Aramis occupied, the other was that of Aramis himself.

"Hang it!" said d'Artagnan to himself, to whose mind the niece of the theologian reverted; "it would be droll if this late flying dove should be in search of our friend's house. But by my soul, that seems more than probable. Ah! my dear friend Aramis, this time I will find you out."

And d'Artagnan, making himself as small as he could, concealed himself in the darkest side of the street, near a stone bench placed at the back of a niche.

The young woman continued to advance, for, in addition to the lightness of her step, which had betrayed her, she had just emitted a little cough which announced a clear sweet voice. D'Artagnan believed this cough to be a signal.

Nevertheless, whether this cough had been answered to by an equivalent signal, which had removed the resolution of the nocturnal seeker, or whether she had recognized that she had arrived at the end of her journey, she boldly drew near to Aramis's shutter, and tapped at three equal intervals with her bent finger.

"This is all very fine, friend Aramis," murmured d'Artagnan.

"Ah! master hypocrite! this is the way you study theology, is it?"

The three blows were scarcely struck, when the inward casement was opened and a light appeared through the apertures of the shutter.

"Ah! ah!" said the listener, "not through doors, but through windows! Ah! ah! this was an unexpected visit. We shall see the windows open, and the lady enter by escalade! Very pretty!"

But to the great astonishment of d'Artagnan, the shutter remained closed. Still more, the light which had shone out for an instant disappeared, and all was dark again.

D'Artagnan thought this could not last long, and continued to look with all his eyes, and listen with all his ears.

He was right; at the end of some seconds two sharp taps were heard in the interior; the young woman of the street replied by a single tap, and the shutter was opened a little way.

It may be judged whether d'Artagnan looked or listened with avidity. Unfortunately the light had been removed into another chamber. But the eyes of the young man were accustomed to the night. Besides, the eyes of Gascons have, as it is asserted, like those of cats, the faculty of seeing in the dark.

D'Artagnan then saw that the young woman took from her pocket a white object, which she unfolded quickly, and which took the form of a handkerchief. She made her interlocutor observe the corner of this unfolded object.

This immediately recalled to d'Artagnan's mind the handkerchief which he had found at the feet of Mme. Bonacieux, which had reminded him of that which he had dragged from under Aramis's foot.

"What the devil could that handkerchief mean?"

Placed where he was, d'Artagnan could not perceive the face of Aramis; we say Aramis, because the young man entertained no doubt that it was his friend who held this dialogue from the interior with the lady of the exterior; curiosity prevailed over prudence, and taking advantage of the preoccupation in which the sight of the handkerchief appeared to have plunged the two personages now on the scene, he stole from his hiding place, and quick as lightning, but stepping with utmost caution, he went and placed himself close to the angle of the wall, from which his eye could plunge into the interior of the apartment.

Upon gaining this advantage, d'Artagnan was near uttering a cry of surprise; it was not Aramis who was conversing with the nocturnal visitor, it was a woman! D'Artagnan, however, could only see enough to recognize the form of her vestments, not enough to distinguish her features.

At the same instant the woman of the apartment drew a second handkerchief from her pocket, and exchanged it for that which had just been shown to her. Then some words were pronounced by the two women. At length the shutter was closed; the woman who was outside the window turned round, and passed within four steps of d'Artagnan, pulling down the hood of her cloak;

but the precaution was too late, d'Artagnan had already recognized Mme. Bonacieux.

Mme. Bonacieux! The suspicion that it was she had crossed the mind of d'Artagnan when she drew the handkerchief from her pocket; but what probability was there that Mme. Bonacieux, who had sent for M. Laporte, in order to be reconducted to the Louvre, should be running about the streets of Paris, at half-past eleven at night, at the risk of being carried off a second time?

It must be, then, for some affair of importance; and what is the affair of the greatest importance to a pretty woman of twenty-five? Love.

But was it on her own account or on account of another person that she exposed herself to such hazards? This was a question the young man asked himself, whom the demon of jealousy already gnawed to the heart, neither more nor less than a settled lover.

There was, besides, a very simple means of satisfying himself whither Mme. Bonacieux was going; that was to follow her. This means was so simple, that d'Artagnan employed it quite naturally and instinctively.

But at the sight of the young man, who detached himself from his wall like a statue walking from its niche, and at the noise of the steps which she heard resound behind her, Mme. Bonacieux uttered a little cry and fled.

D'Artagnan ran after her. It was not a very difficult thing for him to overtake a woman embarrassed with her cloak. He came up to her before she had traversed a third of the street. The unfortunate woman was exhausted, not by fatigue, but by terror, and when d'Artagnan placed his hand upon her shoulder, she sank upon one knee, crying in a choking voice:

"Kill me, if you please, you shall know nothing!"

D'Artagnan raised her by passing his arm around her waist, but as he felt by her weight she was on the point of fainting, he made haste to reassure her by protestations of devotedness. These protestations were nothing for Mme. Bonacieux, for such protestations may be made with the worst intentions in the world; but the voice was all. Madame Bonacieux thought she recognized the sound of that voice; she opened her eyes, cast a quick glance upon the man who had terrified her so, and at once perceiving it was d'Artagnan, she uttered a cry of joy.

"Oh! it is you! it is you! thank God! thank God!"

"Yes, it is I!" said d'Artagnan, "it is I, whom God has sent to watch over you."

"Was it with that intention you followed me?" asked the young woman, with a coquettish smile, whose somewhat bantering character assumed its influence, and with whom all fear had disappeared from the moment in which she recognized a friend in one she had taken for an enemy.

"No," said d'Artagnan; "no, I confess it: it was chance that

threw me in your way; I saw a female knocking at the window of one of my most intimate friends, Aramis."

"This is the first time I ever heard this name pronounced."

"It is the first time, then, that you ever went to that house?"

"Certainly it is."

"And you did not know that it was inhabited by a young Musketeer?"

"Not at all. Besides, you must have seen that the person I spoke to was a woman."

"That is true; but this woman may be one of the friends of Aramis, since she lodges with him."

"That does not concern me."

"But who is she?"

"Oh! that is not my secret."

"My dear Mme. Bonacieux, you are charming, but at the same time you are one of the most mysterious women."

"Do I lose much by that?"

"No; you are, on the contrary, adorable!"

"Give me your arm, and conduct me where I am going."

"But where are you going?"

"You will see, because you will leave me at the door."

D'Artagnan offered his arm to Mme. Bonacieux, who willingly took it, half laughing, half trembling, and both gained the top of Rue la Harpe. When arrived there the young woman seemed to hesitate, as she had before done in the Rue Vaugirard. She, however, appeared by certain signs, to recognize a door; and approaching that door—

"And now, Monsieur," said she, "it is here I have business; a thousand thanks for your honorable company, which has saved me from all the dangers, to which alone I might have been exposed. But the moment is come to keep your word; I am arrived at the place of my destination."

"And you will have nothing to fear on your return?"

"I shall have nothing to fear but robbers. What could they take from me?—I have not a penny about me."

"You forget that beautiful handkerchief, with the coat of arms, which I found at your feet, and replaced in your pocket!"

"Silence! imprudent man! Do you wish to destroy me?"

"You see very plainly that there is still danger for you, since a single word makes you tremble; and you confess that if that word were heard you would be ruined. Come!" cried d'Artagnan, seizing her hands, and surveying her with an ardent glance; "come! be more generous—trust to me; have you not read in my eyes, that there is nothing but devotion and sympathy in my heart?"

"Yes," replied Mme. Bonacieux; "therefore, ask my own secrets, and I will tell them to you; but those of others—that is quite another thing."

"It is all very well," said d'Artagnan. "I shall discover them; all these secrets may have an influence over your life, they must become mine."

"Beware of what you do!" cried the young woman, in a manner so serious as made d'Artagnan start, in spite of himself. "Oh! meddle in nothing which concerns me: do not seek to assist me in that which I am accomplishing. Take no more concern about me; I exist no longer for you, any more than if you had never seen me."

"If you could see my heart," said d'Artagnan, "you would there read so much curiosity that you would pity me; and so much love, that you would instantly satisfy my curiosity. We have nothing to fear from those who love us."

"You speak very quickly of love!" said the young woman, shaking her head.

"That is because love has come suddenly upon me, and for the first time; and because I am only twenty years old."

The young woman looked at him furtively.

"Listen; I am already upon the scent," resumed d'Artagnan. "About three months ago I was near having a duel with Aramis, concerning a handkerchief resembling that you showed to the female in the house; for a handkerchief marked in the same manner, I am sure."

"Are not the initials mine—C. B.—Constance Bonacieux?"

"Or Camille de Bois-Tracy."

"Silence, monsieur! once again, silence! Ah! since the dangers I incur on my own account cannot stop you, think of those you may yourself run."

"Danger for me?"

"Yes; there is risk of imprisonment, risk of life, in knowing me."

"Then I will not leave you."

"Oh!" said the young woman, supplicating him, and clasping her hands together; "in the name of heaven, by the name of a soldier, by the courtesy of a gentleman, depart!—there!—there is midnight striking!—that is the hour at which I am expected."

"Madame," said the young man, bowing; "I can refuse nothing asked of me thus; be satisfied, I will return home instantly."

"Ah! I was quite sure you were a good and brave young man," said Mme. Bonacieux, holding out her hand to him, and placing the other upon the knocker of a little door almost hidden in the wall.

D'Artagnan seized the hand that was held out to him and kissed it ardently.

"Ah! I wish I had never seen you!" cried d'Artagnan, with that ingenuous roughness which women often prefer to the affectations of politeness, because it betrays the depth of the thought and proves that feeling prevails over reason.

"Well!" resumed Mme. Bonacieux, in a voice that was almost caressing, and pressing the hand of d'Artagnan, who had not left hold of hers, "well! I will not say as much as you do; what is lost for to-day, may not be lost forever. Who knows, when I shall be some day at liberty, that I may not satisfy your curi-

osity. But be of good cheer; with some people, everything comes round."

"Oh! you render me the happiest of men! Do not forget this evening—do not forget that promise."

And as if he only felt the strength to detach himself from the hand he held by a violent effort, he sprang away, running, whilst Mme. Bonacieux knocked, as she had done at the shutter, three light and regular taps; then, when he had gained the angle of the street, he returned; the door had been opened, and shut again—the mercer's pretty wife had disappeared.

D'Artagnan pursued his way; and in five minutes he was in the Rue des Fossoyeurs.

"Poor Athos!" said he; "he will never guess what all this means. He will have fallen asleep waiting for me, or else he will have returned home to learn that a woman had been there. A woman at Athos's house! After all," continued d'Artagnan, "there was certainly one in Aramis's house. All this is very strange; I should like to know how it will all end."

"Badly! master—badly!" replied a voice, which the young man recognized as that of Planchet; for, soliloquizing aloud, as very preoccupied people do, he had entered the alley, at the bottom of which were the stairs which led to his chamber.

"How badly? What do you mean by that, you stupid fellow?" asked d'Artagnan; "what has happened, then?"

"All sorts of misfortunes. In the first place, M. Athos is arrested."

"Arrested! Athos arrested! What for?"

"He was found in your lodging—they took him for you."

"And by whom was he arrested?"

"By the guards whom the men in black you put to flight fetched."

"Why did he not tell them his name? Why did he not tell them he knew nothing about this affair?"

"He took care not to do so, master; on the contrary, he came up to me, and said, 'It is your master that wants his liberty at this moment, and not I, since he knows everything, and I, nothing. They will believe he is arrested,, and that will give him time; in three days I will tell them who I am, and they cannot fail to set me at liberty again."

"Bravo, Athos! noble heart!" murmured d'Artagnan. "I know him well there! And what did the catchpoles do?"

"Four conveyed him away, I don't know where—to jail; two remained with the black men, who rummaged every place out, and took all the papers; the two last mounted guard at the door during this examination; then, when all was over, they went away, leaving the house empty and the doors open."

"And Porthos and Aramis?"

"I could not find them; they did not come."

"But they may come at any moment, for you left word that I wanted them?"

"Yes, master."

"Well, don't stir, then; if they come, tell them what has happened. Let them wait for me at the Pineapple Tavern; here it would be dangerous—the house may be watched. I will run to Treville's to tell him all this, and will join them there. But you will remain, will you not? You are not afraid?" said d'Artagnan.

"Be satisfied, master," said Planchet; "you do not know me yet. I am brave when I begin; besides, I am a Picard."

"Then that's understood," said d'Artagnan; "you would rather be killed than desert your post?"

"Yes, master; and there is nothing I would not do to prove that I am attached to you."

"Good!" said d'Artagnan to himself. "It appears that the method I have adopted with this lad is a decidedly good one; I shall employ it upon occasion."

And with all the swiftness of his legs, already a little fatigued, however, with the exercise of the day and night, d'Artagnan directed his course towards Treville's.

M. de Treville was not at home; he was at the Louvre with his company on guard.

It was of importance that he should be informed of what was going on, so d'Artagnan resolved to attempt to get into the Louvre. His uniform of a guard would, he thought, be a passport for him.

As he gained the top of the Rue Guenegaud, he saw two persons whose appearance very much struck him. One was a man, and the other a woman, very much like Mme. Bonacieux in size, and step, so the former could be nobody but Aramis.

Besides, the woman had on that black cloak whose outline d'Artagnan could still see reflected upon the shutter of the Rue de Vaugirard, and upon the door of the Rue de la Harpe.

And still further, the man wore the uniform of a Musketeer.

The woman's hood was pulled down, and the man held a handkerchief to his face; both, this double precaution indicated, had an interest in not being recognized.

They took the bridge; that was d'Artagnan's road, as he was going to the Louvre; d'Artagnan followed them.

He had not gone twenty steps before he became convinced that the woman was really Madame Bonacieux, and the man Aramis.

The man and woman perceived they were watched, and redoubled their speed. D'Artagnan determined upon his course; he passed them, then returned, so as to meet them exactly before the Samaritaine, illuminated by a lamp, which threw its light over all that part of the bridge.

D'Artagnan stopped them.

"What do you want?" demanded the Musketeer, drawing back a step, and with a foreign accent, which proved to d'Artagnan that he was deceived in one part of his conjectures at least.

"It is not Aramis!" cried he.

"No, it is not Aramis; and as by your exclamation I perceive you have mistaken me for another I pardon you."

"You do!" cried d'Artagnan.

"Yes," replied the stranger. "Allow me, then, to pass on, since it is not with me you have any business."

"You are right, it is not with you I have anything to do, but the dame, here."

"You do not know her?" replied the stranger.

"You are deceived; I know her very well."

"Ah," said Mme. Bonacieux, in a tone of reproach, "ah, I had the promise of a soldier and the word of a gentleman; I thought I might have depended upon them!"

"And I, madame!" said d'Artagnan, embarrassed—"you promised me——"

"Take my arm, madame," said the stranger, "and let us proceed on our way."

D'Artagnan, however, stupefied, cast down, annihilated by all that happened so strangely to him, still stood, with his arms folded, before the two.

The Musketeer advanced two steps, and pushed d'Artagnan aside with his hand.

D'Artagnan made a spring backwards, and drew his sword.

At the same time, and with the rapidity of lightning, the unknown drew his.

"In the name of heaven, my lord!" cried Mme. Bonacieux, throwing herself between the combatants, and seizing the swords with her hands.

"My lord!" cried d'Artagnan, enlightened by a sudden idea, "my lord! Pardon me, but are you not——"

"The Duke of Buckingham!" said Mme. Bonacieux, in an undertone; "and now you may ruin us all."

"My lord—madame, I ask a hundred pardons! but I love her, my lord, and was jealous; you know what it is to love! Pardon me, and then tell me how I can risk my life to serve your grace?"

"You are a brave young man!" said Buckingham, holding out his hand to d'Artagnan, who pressed it respectfully. "You offer me your services; with the same frankness I accept them. Follow us at a distance of twenty paces, to the Louvre, and if any one watches us, slay him."

D'Artagnan placed his naked sword under his arm, allowed the Duke and Mme. Bonacieux to proceed twenty steps, and then followed them, ready to execute the instructions of the noble and elegant minister of Charles I.

But fortunately he had no opportunity to give the Duke this proof of his devotion, and the young woman and the handsome Musketeer entered the Louvre, without meeting with any interruption.

As for d'Artagnan, he immediately repaired to the Pineapple Tavern, where he found Porthos and Aramis, waiting for him. But, without giving them any explanation of the alarm and inconvenience he had caused them, he told them that he had alone terminated the affair, in which he had, for a moment, thought he should stand in need of their assistance.

CHAPTER XII.

GEORGE VILLIERS, DUKE OF BUCKINGHAM.

Mme. Bonacieux and the Duke entered the Louvre without difficulty: she was acquainted with all the turnings and windings of this part of the Louvre, destined for the people of the household. She took the Duke by the hand, advanced a little, feeling her way, came to a balustrade, put her foot upon the bottom step, and began to ascend a flight of stairs; the Duke counted two stories. She then turned to the right, followed the course of a long corridor, redescended a story, went a few steps further, introduced a key into a lock, opened the door, and pushed the Duke into an apartment lighted only by a night-lamp, saying: "Remain here, my lord Duke; some one will come." She then went out by the same door, which she locked, so that the Duke found himself literally a prisoner.

Nevertheless, isolated as he was, we must say that the Duke of Buckingham did not experience an instant of fear; one of the salient sides of his character was the seeking of adventures and a love of the romantic. Brave, even rash, and enterprising, this was not the first time he had risked his life in such attempts; he had learnt that the pretended message from Anna of Austria, upon the faith of which he had come to Paris, was a snare, and instead of regaining England, he had, abusing the position in which he had been placed, declared to the Queen that he would not go back again without having seen her. The Queen had at first positively refused, but at length became afraid that the Duke, if exasperated, would commit some rashness.

Buckingham, on being left alone, walked towards a mirror. His Musketeer's uniform became him wonderfully well.

At thirty-five, which was then his age, he passed, with just title, for the handsomest gentleman and the most elegant cavalier of France or England.

At this moment a door concealed in the tapestry opened, and a woman appeared. Buckingham saw this apparition in the glass; he uttered a cry—it was the Queen!

Anna of Austria was then from twenty-six to twenty-seven years of age—that is to say, she was in the full splendor of her beauty.

Buckingham remained for a moment dazzled; never had Anna of Austria appeared to him so beautiful, amidst balls, fêtes, or carousals, as she appeared to him this moment, dressed in a simple robe of white satin, and accompanied by Donna Estefana, the only one of her Spanish women not driven from her by the royal jealousy or by the Cardinal's persecutions.

Anna of Austria took two steps forward; Buckingham threw himself at her feet, and before the Queen could prevent him, kissed the hem of her robe.

"Duke, you already know that it is not I who have caused you to be written to."

"Yes, yes, madame!" cried the Duke; "I know that I must have been mad, senseless, to believe that snow would become animated or marble warm; but what then! they who love easily believe in love—besides, this voyage is not a loss, since I see you."

"Yes," replied Anna, "but you know why and how I see you, my lord! I see you out of pity for yourself; I see you because, insensible to all my sufferings, you persist in remaining in a city where, by remaining, you run the risk of your own life, and make me run the risk of my honor; I see you to tell you that everything separates us, the depths of the sea, the enmity of kingdoms, the sanctity of vows. It is sacrilege to struggle against so many things, my lord. In short, I see you to tell you that we must never see each other again."

"Speak on, madame, speak on, Queen," said Buckingham; "the sweetness of your voice covers the harshness of your words. You talk of sacrilege! why, the sacrilege is the separation of two hearts formed by God for each other."

"My lord," cried the Queen, "you forget that I have never told you I loved you."

"But you have never told me that you did not love me, and truly, to speak such words to me would be, on the part of your Majesty, too great an ingratitude. For tell me, where can you find a love like mine, a love which neither time, nor absence, nor despair can extinguish; a love which contents itself with a lost ribbon, a stray look, or a chance word? It is now three years, madame, since I saw you for the first time, and during those three years I have loved you thus.

"Shall I tell you how you were dressed the first time I saw you? shall I describe to you every one of the ornaments you wore? I shut my eyes, and I can see you such as you then were; I open them again, and I see you such as you are now—a hundred times still more beautiful!"

"What folly!" murmured Anna of Austria, who had not the courage to find fault with the Duke for having so well preserved her portrait in his heart; "what folly to feed a useless passion with such remembrances!"

"And upon what then must I live? I have nothing but remembrances. They are my happiness, my treasures, my hopes. Every time that I see you is a fresh diamond which I enclose in the casket of my heart. This is the fourth which you have let fall and I have picked up; for, in three years, madame, I have only seen you four times; the first which I have just described to you, the second at the mansion of Chevreuse, the third in the gardens of Amiens."

"Duke," said the queen, blushing, "never name that evening."

"Oh, yes! let me speak of it, on the contrary, let me speak of it; that is the most happy and brilliant evening of my life! I would give all my wealth, all my fortunes, all my glory, all the days I have to live, for such an instant, for a night like that!

for that night, madame, that night you loved me, I will swear it."

"My lord, yes, it is possible that the influence of the place, the charm of the beautiful evening, the fascination of your look, the thousand circumstances, in short, which sometimes unite to destroy a woman, were grouped around me on that fatal evening; but my lord, you saw the queen come to the aid of the woman who faltered; at the first word you dared to utter, at the first freedom to which I had to reply, I summoned my attendants."

"Yes, yes! that is true, and any other love but mine would have sunk beneath this ordeal, but my love came out from it more ardent and more eternal."

"Yes, but calumny seized upon all those follies in which I took no part, as you well know, my lord. The King, excited by the Cardinal, made a terrible clamor; Mme. de Vernet was driven from me, Putange was exiled, Mme. de Chevreuse fell into disgrace, and when you wished to come back as ambassador to France, the King himself, remember, my lord, the King himself, opposed it."

"Yes, and France is about to pay for her King's refusal with a war. I am not allowed to see you, madame, but you shall every day hear speak of me! What object, think you, have this expedition to Re and this league with the Protestants of Rochelle which I am projecting? The pleasure of seeing you."

"I have no hope of penetrating sword in hand to Paris, I know that well; but this war may bring round a peace, this peace will require a negotiator, that negotiator will be me. They will not dare to refuse me then, and I will see you, and will be happy for an instant. Thousands of men, it is true, will have to pay for my happiness with their lives, but what will that signify to me, provided I see you again! All this is perhaps madness, folly, but tell me what woman has a lover more truly in love? what Queen has a servant more faithful or more ardent?"

"My lord! my lord! you invoke in your defence things which accuse you more strongly: my lord, all these proofs of love that you boast are of little better than crimes."

"Because you do not love me, madame: if you loved me, you would view all this much otherwise: if you loved me, oh! if you loved me, that would be happiness too great, and I should run mad. Ah! Mme. de Chevreuse, of whom you spoke, but now, Mme. de Chevreuse was less cruel than you. Lord Holland loved her, and she responded to his love."

"Mme. de Chevreuse was not a Queen," murmured Anna of Austria, overcome in spite of herself by the expression of so profound a passion.

"You would love me then, if you were not one; you, madame, say that you would love me then? I am then to believe that it is the dignity of your rank alone that makes you cruel to me: I may then believe that if you had been Mme. de Chevreuse, the

poor Buckingham might have hoped. Thanks for those sweet words! oh, my lovely Queen! a hundred times, thanks!"

"Oh! my lord! you have ill understood, wrongly interpreted; I did not mean to say——"

"Silence! silence!" cried the Duke; "if I am happy in an error do not have the cruelty to deprive me of it. You have told me yourself, madame, that I have been drawn into a snare, and I, perhaps, shall leave my life in it; for, although it be strange, I have for some time had a presentiment that I shall shortly die." And the Duke smiled, with a smile at once sad and charming.

"Oh! God!" cried Anna of Austria, with an accent of terror which proved how much greater an interest she took in the Duke than she ventured to tell.

"I do not tell you this, madame, to terrify you; no, it is even ridiculous for me to name it to you, and, believe me, I take no heed of such dreams. But the words you have just spoken, the hope you have almost given me, will have richly paid all—were it my life."

"Oh! but I," said Anna, "I, Duke, have had presentiments likewise, I have had dreams. I dreamt that I saw you lying, bleeding, wounded."

"In the left side, was it not, and with a knife!" interrupted Buckingham.

"Yes, it was so, my lord, it was so, in the left side, and with a knife. Who can possibly have told you I had had that dream; I have imparted it to no one but my God, and that in my prayers."

"I ask for no more, you love me, madame! it is enough."

"I love you! I!"

"Yes, yes. Would heaven send the same dreams to you as to me, if you did not love me? Should we have the same presentiments if our existences were not associated by our hearts? You love me, my beautiful Queen, and you will weep for me?"

"Oh! my God!" cried Anna of Austria, "this is more than I can bear! In the name of Heaven, Duke, leave me go!"

"Oh! then, some pledge of your indulgence, some object which, coming from you, may assure me that I have not dreamt; something you have worn, and that I may wear in my turn—a ring, a necklace, a chain."

"Will you go then, will you go, if I give you what you ask for?"

"Yes."

Anna of Austria re-entered her apartment, and came out again almost immediately, holding a rosewood casket with her cipher upon it in gold letters.

"Here, my lord, here," said she, "keep this in memory of me."

Buckingham took the casket, and fell a second time on his knees.

"You promised me you would go," said the Queen.

"And I keep my word. Your hand, madame, and I depart."

Anna of Austria stretched forth her hand, closing her eyes, and leaning with the other upon Estefana, for she felt her strength ready to fail her.

Buckingham applied his lips passionately to that beautiful hand, and then rising said:

"Within six months if I am not dead, I shall have seen you again, madame, even if I have the whole world revolutionized for that object, I shall have seen you again."

Faithful to the promise he had made, with a desperate effort, he rushed out of the apartment.

In the corridor he met Mme. Bonacieux, who waited for him, and who, with the same precautions and the same good fortune, conducted him out of the Louvre.

CHAPTER XIII.

BONACIEUX.

THERE was in all this, as may have been observed, one personage concerned, of whom, notwithstanding his precarious position, we have appeared to take but very little notice; this personage is M. Bonacieux, the respectable martyr of the political and amorous intrigues which entangled themselves so nicely together at this gallant and chivalric period.

The officers who had arrested him, conducted him straight to the Bastile, where, introduced into a half-subterranean gallery, he became, on the part of those who had brought him, the object of the grossest insults and the harshest treatment. They perceived that they had not to deal with a gentleman, and they treated him like a beggar.

At the end of half-an-hour, or thereabouts, an officer came to put an end to his tortures, but not to his disquiet, by giving the order for M. Bonacieux's being led to the question-hall.

Ordinarily, prisoners were interrogated in their own cells, but they did not pay so much respect to M. Bonacieux.

Two guards attended the mercer who made him traverse a court, and enter a corridor in which were three sentinels, opened a door and pushed him unceremoniously into an apartment, the whole furniture of which consisted of one table, one chair, and a commissary seated in the chair, and was busily writing upon the table.

The two guards led the prisoner towards the table, and, upon a sign from the commissary, drew back so far as to be unable to hear the examination.

The commissary, who had till this time held his head down over his papers, looked up to see what sort of person he had to do with. This commissary was a man of very repulsive mien, with a pointed nose, yellow and salient cheek-bones, small, but keen penetrating eyes, and an expression of countenance partaking of the polecat and the fox. His head, supported by a

long and flexible neck, issued from his large black robe, balancing itself with a motion very much like that of the tortoise when drawing his head out of his shell.

He began by asking M. Bonacieux his name, prenames, age, condition, and abode.

The accused replied that his name was Jacques Michel Bonacieux, that he was fifty-one years old, was a retired mercer, and lived in Rue des Fossoyeurs, No. 14.

The commissary then, instead of continuing to interrogate him, made him a long speech upon the danger there is for an obscure citizen to meddle with public matters.

He complicated this exordium by an exposition in which he painted the power and the acts of the Cardinal, that incomparable minister, that conqueror of past ministers, that example for ministers to come—acts and power which no one would thwart with impunity.

After this second part of his discourse, fixing his hawk's-eye upon poor Bonacieux, he bade him reflect upon the seriousness of his situation.

Bonacieux reflected, in fact.

"But, Commissary," said he, timidly, "I beg you to believe that I know and appreciate more than anybody the merit of the incomparable Eminence by whom we have the honor to be governed."

"Indeed?" asked the commissary, with an air of doubt, "if that is really the case, how came you in the Bastile?"

"How!" replied Bonacieux, "is what it is impossible for me to tell you, because I don't know myself; but to a certainty it is not for having, knowingly at least, disobliged the Cardinal."

"You must, nevertheless, have committed a crime, since you are here, accused of high treason."

"Of high treason!" cried the terrified Bonacieux. "How is it possible for a poor mercer, who detests all Huguenots, and abhors all Spaniards, to be accused of high treason? Consider, the thing is materially impossible."

"M. Bonacieux," said the commissary, looking at the accused, as if his little eyes had the faculty of reading to the very depths of hearts, "M. Bonacieux, you have a wife?"

"Yes, monsieur," replied the mercer, in a tremble, feeling that that was the point at which affairs were likely to become perplexing, "that is to say, I had one. She has been carried off from me."

"Been carried off?" said the commissary. "Oho!"

Bonacieux felt that matters were becoming more and more perplexing.

"Carried off?" resumed the commissary, "and do you know who the man is that has committed this outrage?"

"I think I know him. A tall, dark man, of lofty carriage, who has the air of a great lord; he has followed us several times, as I think, when I have waited for my wife at the Louvre private door to fetch her home."

The commissary appeared to experience a little uneasiness.

"And his name?" said he.

"Oh! as to his name, I know nothing about it, but, if I were ever to meet him, I should know him in an instant, I will answer for it, even if he were among a thousand persons."

The face of the commissary grew still darker.

"That is all very well, and enough for to-day; before we proceed further, some one must be informed that you know the abductor of your wife."

"But I have not told you that I know him!" cried Bonacieux in despair, "I told you, on the contrary——"

"Take away the prisoner," said the commissary to the two guards. "To a dungeon; the first you come to, provided it be a safe one," said the commissary, with an indifference which penetrated poor Bonacieux with horror.

"Alas!" said he to himself, "misfortune hangs over me; my wife must have committed some frightful crime; they believe that I am her accomplice, and will punsh me with her! she must have spoken, confessed everything, a woman is so weak! A dungeon, the first he comes to! that's it! one night is soon passed over; and to-morrow to the rack and the gallows! Oh! Lord! have pity on me!"

Without listening the least in the world to the lamentations of Bonacieux, to which, besides, they must have been pretty well accustomed, the two guards took the prisoner, each by an arm, and led him away, whilst the commissary wrote a letter in haste, and despatched it by an officer in waiting.

Bonacieux could not close his eyes; not because his dungeon was so very disagreeable, but because his uneasiness was too great to allow him to sleep. He sat up all night upon his stool, starting at the least noise; and when the first rays of the sun penetrated into his chamber, the dawn itself appeared to him to have taken a funeral tint.

All at once he heard his bolts drawn, and sprang up with a terrified bound, believing that they were come to fetch him to the scaffold; so that when he saw purely and simply that it was only his commissary of the preceding evening, attended by his officer, he was ready to embrace them both.

"Your affair has become more complicated since yesterday evening, my good man, and I advise you to tell the whole truth; for your repentance alone can remove the anger of the Cardinal."

"Why, I am ready to tell everything," cried Bonacieux.

"Where is your wife, in the first place?"

"Why, did not I tell you she had been stolen away from me?"

"Yes, but yesterday, at five o'clock in the afternoon, thanks to you, she escaped."

"My wife escaped!" cried Bonacieux. "Oh! unfortunate creature! If she has escaped, it is no fault of mine, I will swear."

"What business had you then to go into the chamber of M. d'Artagnan, your neighbor, with whom you had a long conference, in the course of the day?"

"Ah! yes, yes, that is true, and I confess that I was in the wrong. I did go."

"What was the object of that visit?"

"To beg him to assist me in finding my wife. I believed I had a right to endeavor to recover her; I was deceived as, it appears, and I ask your pardon for so doing."

"And what did M. d'Artagnan reply?"

"M. d'Artagnan promised me his assistance; but I soon found out that he was betraying me."

"You are imposing upon justice! M. d'Artagnan made an agreement with you, and in virtue of that agreement put to flight the men of the police who had arrested your wife, and has placed her out of reach of all inquiries."

"M. d'Artagnan has carried off my wife! What can that mean?"

"Fortunately M. d'Artagnan is in our hands, and you shall be confronted with him."

"Ah! I ask no better," cried Bonacieux; "I shall not be sorry to see the face of an acquaintance."

"Bring in M. d'Artagnan," said the commissary to the guards.

The two guards led in Athos.

"M. d'Artagnan," said the commissary, addressing Athos, "declare all that passed yesterday between you and this person here."

"But," cried Bonacieux, "this is not M. d'Artagnan that you have brought before me!"

"What! not M. d'Artagnan?" exclaimed the commissary.

"Not the least in the world like him," replied Bonacieux.

"What is this gentleman's name?" asked the commissary.

"I cannot tell you; I have seen him, but I don't know what his name is."

"Your name?" asked the commissary.

"Athos," replied the Musketeer.

"But that is not a man's name, but a mountain's," protested the poor commissary, who began to feel a little bewildered.

"That is my name," said Athos, quietly.

"But you said that your name was d'Artagnan."

"Who, I?"

"Yes, you."

"My guards said to me: 'You are M. d'Artagnan?' I answered, 'You think so, do you?' My guards again exclaimed that they were sure I was. I did not think it worth while to contradict them. Besides, I might myself be deceived."

"You insult the majesty of justice."

"Not at all," said Athos, calmly.

"You are M. d'Artagnan."

"You see that you persist in saying that I am."

"But, I tell you," cried M. Bonacieux, in his turn, "there is not the least doubt about the matter. M. d'Artagnan is my tenant, although he does not pay me my rent, and even better on that account ought I to know him. M. d'Artagnan is a young man, scarcely nineteen, and this gentleman must be thirty at

least. M. d'Artagnan is in M. Desessart's guards, and monsieur is in the company of Treville's musketeers; look at his uniform!"

"That's true," murmured the commissary; "that's true."

At this moment the door was opened quickly, and a messenger, introduced by one of the Bastile turnkeys, gave a letter to the commissary.

"Oh! unhappy woman!" cried he.

"How! what do you say? of whom do you speak? It is not of my wife, I hope!"

"On the contrary, it is of her. Your affair is becoming a pretty one."

"But," said the agitated mercer, "do me the pleasure to tell me how my own affair can become the worse by anything my wife does whilst I am in prison."

"Because that which she does is part of a plan concerted between you, an infernal plan!"

"I swear to you, that you are in the profoundest error, that I know nothing in the world about what my wife had to do; that I am entirely a stranger to what she has done, and that if she has committed any follies, I renounce her, abjure her, and curse her!"

"Bah!" said Athos to the commissary, "if you have no more need of me, send me somewhere; your Bonacieux is very unpleasant company."

"Reconduct the prisoners to their dungeons," said the commissary, designating, by the same gesture, Athos and Bonacieux, "and let them be guarded more closely than ever."

"And yet," said Athos, with his habitual calmness, "if it be M. d'Artagnan who is concerned in this matter, I do not perceive too clearly how I can take his place."

"Do as I bade you," cried the commissary, "and preserve the profoundest secrecy! You understand me?"

Athos shrugged his shoulders, and followed his guards silently, whilst Bonacieux uttered lamentations enough to break the heart of a tiger.

They led back the mercer to the same dungeon in which he had passed the night, and left him to himself during the day. Bonacieux wept away the hours like a true tradesman, not being at all a man of the sword, as he himself informed us. In the evening, at the moment he had made up his mind to lie down upon the bed, he heard steps in his corridor. These steps drew near to his dungeon, the door was thrown open, and the guards appeared.

"Follow me," said an exempt, who came behind the guards.

"Follow you!" cried Bonacieux, "follow you, at this hour! Where, in the name of heaven?"

"Where we have orders to lead you."

"But that is not an answer, that."

"It is, nevertheless, the only one we can give you."

"Ah! my God!" murmured the poor mercer, "now, indeed, I

am lost!" And he followed the guards who came for him mechanically and without resistance.

He passed along the same corridor as before, crossed a first court, then a second side of the building; at length at the gate of the entrance-court he found a carriage surrounded by four guards on horseback. They made him get into this carriage, the exempt placed himself by his side, the door was locked, and they were left in a rolling prison. The carriage was put in motion as slowly as a funeral car. Through the closely fastened windows the prisoner could perceive the houses and the pavement, that was all; but, true Parisian as he was, Bonacieux could recognize every street by the rails, the signs, and the lamps.

The carriage turned the Rue des Bons Enfans, and stopped before a low door.

The door opened, two guards received Bonacieux in their arms from the exempt, who supported him; they carried him along an alley, up a flight of stairs, and made him enter a chamber, where he appeared to be expected.

It was a large cabinet, with the walls furnished with arms, offensive and defensive, close and stifling, and in which there was already a fire, although it was scarcely the end of September. A square table, covered with books and papers, upon which was unrolled an immense plan of the city of La Rochelle, occupied the centre of the apartment.

Standing before the chimney was a man of middle height, of a haughty, pround mien; with piercing eyes, a large brow, and a thin face, which was made still longer by a royal (or imperial, as it is now called), surmounted by a pair of moustaches. Although this man was scarcely thirty-six or thirty-seven years of age, hair, moustaches, and royal, all began to be gray. This man, except a sword, had all the appearance of a soldier; and his buff boots, still slightly covered with dust, indicated that he had been on horseback in the course of the day.

This man was Armand Jean Duplessis, Cardinal Richelieu, not such as he is now represented—broken down like an old man, suffering like a martyr, his body bent, his voice extinct; buried in a large easy chair, as in an anticipated tomb, no longer living but by the strength of his genius, and no longer maintaining the struggle with Europe but by the eternal application of his thoughts—but such as he really was at this period; that is to say, an active and gallant cavalier, already weak of body, but sustained by that moral power which made of him one of the most extraordinary men that ever existed—preparing, to drive the English from the Isle of Re, and lay siege to La Rochelle.

At first sight, nothing denoted the Cardinal; and it was impossible for those who did not know his face to guess in whose presence they were.

The poor mercer remained standing at the door, whilst the eyes of the personage we have just described were fixed upon him, and appeared to wish to penetrate even into the depths of the past.

"Is this that Bonacieux?" asked he, after a moment of silence. "Give me those papers, and leave us."

The officer took the papers pointed out from the table, gave them to him who asked for them, bowed to the ground, and retired.

Bonacieux recognized, in these papers, his Bastile examination records. From time to time the man raised his eyes from the writings, and plunged them like poniards into the heart of the poor mercer.

At the end of ten minutes' reading, and ten seconds of examination, the Premier was satisfied.

"That head has never conspired," murmured he; "but it matters not; we will see, nevertheless. You are accused of high treason," said the Cardinal, slowly.

"So I have been told already, monseigneur," cried Bonacieux giving his interrogator the title he had heard the officer give him, "but I swear to you that I know nothing about it."

The Cardinal repressed a smile.

"You have conspired with your wife, the Duchess de Chevreuse, and the Duke of Buckingham."

"In fact, monseigneur, I have heard her pronounce all those names. She said that Cardinal de Richelieu had decoyed the Duke of Buckingham to Paris to ruin him and to ruin the Queen."

"She said that?" cried the Cardinal, with violence.

"Yes, monseigneur, but I told her she was wrong to talk about such things; and that his Eminence was incapable——"

"Hold your tongue! you are stupid," replied the Prime Minister.

"That's exactly what my wife said, monseigneur."

"Do you know who carried off your wife?"

"No, monseigneur."

"You have suspicions, nevertheless?"

"Yes, monseigneur; but these suspicions appeared to be disagreeable to the commissary, and I no longer hold them."

"Your wife has escaped! Did you know that?"

"No, monseigneur; I learnt it since I have been in prison, and that from the conversation of the commissary—a very good kind of man."

The Cardinal repressed another smile.

"Then you are ignorant of what is become of your wife, since her flight."

"Absolutely, monseigneur; but she has most likely returned to the Louvre."

"At one o'clock this morning she had not returned."

"Good God! what can have become of her then?"

"We shall know, be assured; nothing is concealed from the Cardinal; he knows everything."

"In that case, monseigneur, do you believe the Cardinal will be so kind as to tell me what has become of my wife?"

"Perhaps he may; but you must, in the first place, reveal to

the Cardinal all you know of your wife's relations with Madame de Chevreuse."

"But, monseigneur, I know nothing about them; I have never seen her!"

"When you went to fetch your wife from the Louvre, did you always return directly home?"

"Scarcely ever; she had business to transact with two linen-drapers, to whose houses I conducted her."

"And where did they live?"

"One Rue de Vaugirard, the other Rue de la Harpe."

"Did you go into these houses with her?"

"Never, monseigneur; I waited at the door."

"And what excuse did she make for going in this manner alone?"

"She gave me none; she told me to wait, and I waited."

"You are a very complacent husband, my dear Bonacieux," said the Chief of the State.

"He calls me his dear," said the mercer to himself. "Pest! matters are going all right!"

"Do you know the numbers?"

"No 25 in the Rue de Vaugirard, 75 in the Rue de la Harpe."

"That's well," said the Cardinal.

At these words, he took up a silver bell, and rang it; the officer entered.

"Go," said he, in a subdued voice, "and find Rochefort, tell him to come to me immediately, if he is returned."

"The count is here," said the officer, "and requests to speak with your Eminence instantly."

"Let him come in, then; let him come in, then!" said the Cardinal, eagerly.

The officer sprang out of the apartment with that alacrity which all the minister's servants displayed in obeying him.

"To your Eminence!" murmured Bonacieux, rolling his eyes round in astonishment.

Five seconds had scarcely elapsed after the disappearance of the officer, when the door opened, and a new personage entered.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE MAN OF MEUNG.

"It is he!" cried Bonacieux.

"He! What he?" asked the Cardinal.

"The man that took away my wife!"

The Cardinal rang a second time. The officer appeared.

"Place this man in the care of his guards again, and let him wait till I send for him."

"No, monseigneur! no! it is not he!" cried Bonacieux "no, I was deceived: this is quite a different man, and does not re-

semble him at all. The gentleman is, I am sure, a very good sort of man!"

"Take away that fool!" said the Cardinal.

The officer took Bonacieux by the arm, and led him into the antechamber, where he found his two guards.

The newly introduced personage followed Bonacieux impatiently with his eyes till he was gone out, and the moment the door closed, he advanced eagerly towards the Cardinal, and said:

"They have seen each other!"

"The Queen and the Duke?" cried the statesman.

"Yes."

"Where?"

"At the Louvre."

"Who told you of it?"

"Madame Lannoy, who is devoted to your Eminence, as you know."

"Why did she not let me know sooner?"

"Whether by chance or from mistrust, I don't know; but the Queen made Madame de Surgis sleep in her chamber, and detained her all day."

"Well, we are beaten! Now let us try to take our revenge."

"I will assist you with all my heart, monseigneur; be assured of that."

"How did it take place?"

"At half-past twelve the Queen was with her women in her bedchamber, when some one came and brought her a handkerchief from her mistress of the linen-press——"

"And then!"

"The Queen immediately exhibited strong emotion; and notwithstanding that her face was covered with rouge, evidently turned pale——"

"Well, go on!"

"She, however, rose, and with a trembling voice: 'Ladies,' said she, 'wait for me ten minutes, I shall soon return.' She then opened the door of her alcove, and went out for three-quarters of an hour."

"Did none of her women accompany her?"

"Only Donna Estefana."

"Did she afterwards return?"

"Yes; but to take a little rosewood casket, with her cipher upon it; and went out again immediately."

"Does Madame Lannoy know what was in that casket?"

"Yes; the diamond studs which his Majesty gave the Queen."

"Madame Lannoy, then, is of opinion that she gave them to Buckingham?"

"She is sure of it. In the course of the day, Madame de Lannoy, in her quality of tire woman, looked for this casket, appearing uneasy at not finding it, and at length asked the Queen if she knew anything about it. The Queen became exceedingly red, and replied, that having on the preceding evening broken one of those studs, she had sent it to her goldsmith to be repaired."

"And the goldsmith says——?"

"The goldsmith has heard of nothing of the kind."

"Right! right! Rochefort, all is not lost; and perhaps—perhaps—everything is for the best!"

"The fact is, that I do not doubt your Eminence's genius——"

"Will repair the blunder of his agent—is that it?"

"That is exactly what I was going to say, if your Eminence had permitted me to finish my sentence."

"Do you know where the Duchesse de Chevreuse and the Duke of Buckingham are now concealed?"

"No, monseigneur; my people could tell me nothing on that head."

"But I know. Or, at least I guess. They were, one in the Rue Vaugirard, No. 25; the other in the Rue de la Harpe, No. 75. Take ten men of my guards, and search the house thoroughly."

"Instantly, monseigneur."

And Rochefort went hastily out of the apartment.

The Cardinal, upon being left alone, reflected for an instant, and then rang the bell a third time. The same officer appeared.

"Bring the prisoner in again," said the ruler.

Master Bonacieux was introduced afresh, and upon a sign from the Cardinal, the officer retired.

"You have deceived me!" said the Cardinal, sternly.

"I!" cried Bonacieux; "I deceive your Eminence!"

"Your wife, when going to Rue de Vaugirard, and Rue de la Harpe, did not go to meet linendrapers."

"Then whom did she go to meet, in the name of God?"

"She went to meet the Duchesse de Chevreuse and the Duke of Buckingham."

"Yes," cried Bonacieux, recalling all his remembrances of the circumstances, "yes, that's it. Your Eminence is right. I told my wife, several times, that it was surprising that linendrapers should live in such houses as those—in houses that had no signs—but she only always laughed at me. Oh! monseigneur!" continued Bonacieux, throwing himself at his Eminence's feet, "ah! how truly you are Cardinal, the great man of genius whom all the world reveres."

The Cardinal, however contemptible might be the triumph gained over so vulgar a being as Bonacieux, did not the less enjoy it for an instant; then, almost immediately, as if a fresh thought had occurred, to the mercer, he said:

"Rise, my good friend, you are a worthy man."

"The Cardinal has touched me with his hand! I have touched the hand of the great man!" cried Bonacieux: "the great man has called me his friend!"

"Yes, my friend; yes!" said the Cardinal, with that paternal tone which he sometimes knew how to assume, but which deceived none who knew him; "and as you have been unjustly

suspected, well! you must be indemnified; here! take this purse of a hundred pistoles, and pardon me."

And the Cardinal made him a sign with his hand to which Bonacieux replied by bowing to the ground; he then went out backwards, and when he was in the antechamber, the Cardinal heard him, in his enthusiasm, roaring: "Hurrah for the great Cardinal!"

The Premier listened with a smile to this vociferous manifestation of the feelings of Bonacieux; and then, when Bonacieux's cries were no longer audible—

"Good!" said he, "that man would, henceforward, lay down his life for me."

And the statesman began to examine with the greatest attention the map of La Rochelle, which, as we have said, lay open upon the table, tracing with a pencil the line in which the famous dike was to pass, which, eighteen months later, shut up the port of the besieged city. As he was in the deepest of his strategic meditations, the door opened, and Rochefort returned.

"Well!" said the minister, eagerly, rising with a promptitude which proved the degree of importance he attached to the commission with which he had charged the count.

"Well!" said the latter, "a young woman of about twenty-six or twenty-eight years of age, and a man of from thirty-five to forty, have lodged at the two houses pointed out by your Eminence, but the woman left last night, and the man this morning."

"They were the persons!" cried the other, looking at the clock; "and now it is too late to have them pursued; the Duchess is at Tours, and the Duke at Boulogne. It is at London they must be met with."

"What are your Eminence's orders!"

"Not a word of what has passed; let the Queen remain in perfect security; let her be ignorant that we know her secret; let her believe that we are in search of some conspiracy or other. Send me the keeper of the seals, Seguier."

"And what has your Eminence done with Bonacieux?"

"All that could be done: I have made him a spy upon his wife."

The Count de Rochefort bowed like a man who acknowledges as great the superiority of the master, and retired.

"Tell Vitray to come to me," said the Premier, "and tell him to get ready for a journey."

The instant after, the man he required was before him, booted and spurred.

"Vitray," said he, "you will go, with all speed, to London. You must not stop an instant on the way. You will deliver this letter to My-Lady. Here is an order for two hundred pistoles; call upon my treasurer and get the money. You shall have as much again if you are back within six day, and have executed your commission well."

The messenger, without replying a single word, bowed, took

the letter, with the order for the two hundred pistoles, and retired.

These were the contents of the letter:

"My Lady—Be at the first ball which the Duke of Buckingham shall be present. He will wear on his doublet twelve diamond studs; get as near to him as you can, and cut off two of them. As soon as these studs shall be in your possession, inform me."

CHAPTER XV.

MEN OF THE GOWN AND MEN OF THE SWORD.

On the day after these events had taken place, Athos not having re-appeared, Treville was informed by d'Artagnan and Porthos of the circumstance. As to Aramis, he had asked for leave of absence for five days, and was gone, it was said, to Rouen, on family business.

M. de Treville was the father of his soldiers. The lowest or the least known of them, as soon as he assumed the uniform, was as sure of his aid and support as his brother himself.

He repaired then, instantly, to the residence of the lieutenant-criminel. The officer who commanded the post of the Croix-Rouge was sent for, and by successive inquiries they found that Athos was at the time lodged in the Fort l'Eveque.

Athos had passed through all the examinations we have seen Bonacieux undergo.

We were present at the scene in which the two captives were confronted with each other. Athos, who had till that time said nothing, for fear that d'Artagnan, interrupted in his turn, should not have the time necessary: but from this moment Athos declared that his name was Athos, and not d'Artagnan. He added that he did not know either of the Bonacieux; that he had never spoken to them; that he had come, at about ten o'clock in the evening, to pay a visit to his friend, M. d'Artagnan, but that till that hour he had been at M. de Treville's, where he had dined; "twenty witnesses," added he, "could attest the fact," and he named several distinguished gentlemen, and among them was the Duke de la Tremouille.

The second commissary was as much bewildered as the first had been at the simple but firm declaration of the Musketeer, upon whom he was anxious to take the revenge which men of the gown like at all times to gain over men of the sword; but the name of M. de Treville, and of the Duke, commanded a little reflection.

Athos was then sent to the Cardinal, but unfortunately he was at the Louvre with the King.

It was precisely at this moment, at which M. de Treville, without being able to find Athos, arrived at the palace.

As Captain of the life-guards, Treville had the right to enter at all times.

It is well known how violent the king's prejudices were against the Queen, and how carefully these prejudices were kept up by the Cardinal, who, in intrigues, mistrusted women much more than men. One of the principal causes of this prejudice was the friendship of Anna of Austria for Mme. de Chevreuse. These two women gave him more uneasiness than the war with Spain, the quarrel with England, or the embarrassment of the finances. In his eyes, and to his perfect conviction, Mme. de Chevreuse not only served the Queen in her political intrigues, but, which troubled him still more, in her love affairs.

At the first word the Cardinal spoke of Mme. de Chevreuse, who, though exiled to Tours, and who was believed to be in that city, had been at Paris, remained there five days, and had outwitted the police, the King flew into a furious passion. Although capricious and unfaithful, the King wished to be called Louis the Just and Louis the Chaste. Posterity will find a difficulty in understanding this character, which history explains only by facts and never by reasonings.

But when the Cardinal added, that not only Mme. de Chevreuse had been in Paris, but still further, that the Queen had renewed with her, by the means of one of those mysterious correspondences which at that time was named a cabal; when he affirmed that he, the Cardinal, was about to unravel the most closely twisted thread of this intrigue, when at the moment of arresting in the feat, with all the proofs about her, the Queen's emissary to the exiled Duchess, a Musketeer had dared to interrupt the course of justice violently, by falling, sword in hand, upon the honest men of the law charged with investigating impartially the whole affair, in order to place it before the eyes of the King. Louis XIII. could not contain himself, and he made a step towords the Queen's apartments with that pale and mute indignation, which, when it broke out, led this Prince, to the commission of the coldest cruelty.

And yet, in all this, the Premier had not yet said a word about the Duke of Buckingham.

At this instant M. de Treville entered, cold, polite, and in irreproachable costume.

Rendered aware of what had passed by the presence of the Cardinal, and the alteration in the King's countenance, M. de Treville felt himself something like Samson before the Philistines.

Louis XIII. had already placed his hand on the button of the door; at the noise of M. de Treville's entrance he turned round.

"You arrived in good time, monsieur," said the King, who, when his passions were raised to a certain point, could not dissemble; "I have learned some pretty things concerning your Musketeers!"

"And I," said M. de Treville, coldly, "I have some pretty

things to inform your Majesty of, concerning these men of the robe."

"What do you say?" said the King with hateur.

"'I have the honor to inform your Majesty," continued M. de Treville, in the same tone, "that a party of procureurs, commissaries, and men of the police, very estimable people, but very inveterate, as it appears, against the uniform, have taken upon themselves to arrest in a house, to lead away through the open street, and throw into the Fort l'Eveque, all upon an order which they have refused to show me, one of my, or rather your Musketeers, sire, of irreproachable conduct, of an almost illustrious reputation, and whom your Majesty knows favorably, M. Athos."

"Athos!" said the King, mechanically; "yes, indeed, I know that name."

"Let your Majesty remember," said M. de Treville, "that M. Athos is the Musketeer, who, in the annoying duel which you are acquainted with, had the misfortune to wound M. de Cahusac so seriously. Apropos, monseigneur," continued de Treville, addressing the Cardinal, "M. de Cahusac is quite recovered, is he not?"

"Thank you!" said the Cardinal, biting his lips with anger.

"M. Athos, then, went to pay a visit to one of his friends, at the time absent," continued M. de Treville, "to a young Bearnais, a cadet in his Majesty's guards, the company of M. Desessarts, but scarcely had he arrived at his friend's, and taken up a book, whilst waiting his return, when a crowd of bailiffs and soldiers mixed, came and laid siege to the house, broke open several doors——"

The Cardinal made the King a sign, which signified, "That was on account of the affair about which I spoke to you."

"Oh! we all know that," interrupted the King; "for all that was done for our service."

"Then," said Treville, "was it also for your Majesty's service, that one of my Musketeers, who was innocent, has been seized; that he has been placed between two guards, like a malefactor; and that this gallant man, who has ten times shed his blood in your Majesty's service, and is ready to shed it again, has been paraded through the midst of an insolent populace?"

"Bah!" said the King, who began to be shaken, "was it managed so?"

"M. de Treville," said the Cardinal, with the greatest phlegm, "does not tell your Majesty that his innocent Musketeer, this gallant man, had only an hour before attacked, sword in hand, four commissaries of inquiry, who were delegated by me to examine into an affair of the highest importance."

"I defy your Eminence to prove it," cried M. de Treville, with his Gascon freedom and military roughness; "for one hour before M. Athos, who, I will confide it to your Majesty, is really a man of the highest quality, did me the honor, after having dined with me, to be conversing in the salon of my hotel, with the

Duke de la Tremouille and Comte de Chalus, who happened to be there."

The King looked at the Cardinal.

"A report attests it," said the Cardinal, replying aloud to the mute interrogation of his Majesty; "and the ill-treated people have drawn up the following, which I have the honor to present to your Majesty."

"And is the report of lawyers to be placed in comparison with the word of honor of a man of the sword?" replied Treville, haughtily.

"Come, come, Treville, hold your tongue," said the King.

"If his Eminence entertains any suspicion against one of my Musketeers," said Treville, "the justice of the Cardinal is sufficiently well known to induce me, myself, to demand an inquiry."

"In the house in which this judicial inquiry was made," continued the impassable Cardinal, "there lodges, I believe, a young Bearnais, a friend of the Musketeer's."

"Your Eminence means M. d'Artagnan."

"I mean a young man whom you patronize, M. de Treville."

"Yes, your Eminence, it is the same."

"Do you not suspect this young man of having given bad advice——"

"To M. Athos! to a man double his age?" interrupted M. de Treville. "No, monseigneur. Besides, M. d'Artagnan passed the evening at my hotel."

"Well," said the Cardinal, "everybody seems to have passed the evening at your hotel!"

"Does your Eminence doubt my word?" said De Treville, with a brow flushed with anger.

"No, God forbid!" said the Cardinal; "but only let me inquire at what hour he was with you?"

"Oh, that I can speak to positively, your Eminence; for as he came in I remarked that it was but half-past nine by the clock, although I had believed it to be later."

"And at what hour did he leave your hotel?"

"At half-past ten; an hour after the event."

"Well, but," replied the Cardinal, who could not for an instant suspect the loyalty of De Treville, and who felt that the victory was escaping from his hands, "well, but Athos *was* taken in the house of the Rue des Fossoyeurs."

"Is one friend forbidden to visit another or a Musketeer of my company to fraternize with a guard of M. Desessarts's company?"

"Yes, when the house in which he fraternizes is suspected."

"That house is suspected, Treville," said the King; "perhaps you were not aware of that?"

"Indeed, sire, I knew nothing of the circumstance. The house may be suspected, but I deny that it is so in the part of it inhabited by d'Artagnan; for I can affirm, sire, if I can believe what he says, that there does not exist a more devoted servant

of your Majesty, or a more profound admirer of Monsieur the Cardinal."

"Was it not this d'Artagnan who wounded, one day, Jussac, in that unfortunate encounter which took place near the convent of the Carmes Dechausses?" asked the King, looking at the Cardinal, who colored with vexation.

"And the next day Bernajoux. Yes, sire, yes, it is the same. Your Majesty has an excellent memory."

"Come, how shall we determine?" said the King.

"That concerns your Majesty more than me," said the Premier. "I should affirm the culpability."

"And I deny it," said De Treville. "But his Majesty has judges, and these judges will decide."

"That is best," said the King. "Send the case before the judges; it is their business to judge, and they will judge."

"Only," replied Treville, "it is a sad thing that, in the unfortunate time in which we live, the purest life, the most incontestable virtue, cannot exempt a man from infamy and persecution. The army, I will answer for it, will be but a little pleased at being exposed to rigorous treatment on account of police business."

The expression was imprudent; but M. de Treville launched it with a full knowledge of his cause. He was desirous of an explosion, because in that case the mine throws forth fire, and fire enlightens.

"Police!" cried the King, taking up De Treville's word; "And what do you know about them, monsieur? Manage your Musketeers, and do not annoy me in this way. It appears, according to your account, that if, unfortunately, a Musketeer is arrested, France is in danger! Here's a piece of work about a Musketeer! Why I would arrest ten of them, the deuce! a hundred, even—all the company! And I would not allow a murmur!"

"From the moment they are suspected by your Majesty," said Treville, "the Musketeers are guilty; therefore, you see me prepared to surrender my sword; for, after having accused my soldiers, there can be no doubt that the Cardinal will end by accusing me. It is best to constitute myself at once a prisoner with M. Athos, who is already arrested, and with M. d'Artagnan, who most probably will be arrested."

"Gascon-headed man! will you have done?" said the King.

"Sire," replied Treville, without lowering his voice in the least, "either order my Musketeer to be restored to me, or let him be tried."

"He shall be tried," said the minister.

"Well, so much the better; for in that case I shall demand of his Majesty permission to plead for him."

The King became afraid of an outbreak.

"If his Eminence," said he, "had not personal motives——"

The Cardinal saw what the King was about to say, and interrupted him:

"Pardon me," said he; "but the instant your Majesty considers me a prejudiced judge, I withdraw."

"Come," said the King, "will you swear by my father that M. Athos was at your residence during the event, and that he took no part in it?"

"By your glorious father, and by yourself—who are that which I love and venerate the most in the world—I swear it!"

"Be so kind as to reflect, sire," said the Cardinal. "If we release the prisoner thus, we shall never be able to know the truth."

"M. Athos will always be to be found," replied Treville—"always ready to answer, when it shall please the men of the long robe to interrogate him. He will not desert, M. le Cardinal, be assured of that: I will answer for him."

"No, he will not desert," said the King; "he can always be found, as M. de Treville says. Besides," added he, lowering his voice, and looking with a suppliant air at the Cardinal, "let us give them apparent security; there is policy in that."

This policy of Louis XIII.'s made Richelieu smile.

"Order it as you please, sire; you possess the right of pardoning."

"The right of pardoning only applies to the guilty," said Treville, who was determed to have the last word, "and my Musketeer is innocent. It is not mercy, then, that you are about to accord, sire; it is justice."

"And he is in the Fort l'Eveque?" said the King.

"Yes, sire, in solitary confinement, in a dungeon, like the lowest criminal."

"The devil!" murmured the King; "what must be done?"

"Sign the order for his release, and all will be said," replied the minister. "I believe with your Majesty, that M. de Treville's guarantee is more than sufficient."

Treville bowed very respectfully, with a joy that was not unmixed with fear; he would have preferred an obstinate resistance on the part of the Cardinal, to this sudden yielding.

The King signed the order, and Treville carried it away without delay.

At the moment he was about to leave the presence, the Cardinal gave him a friendly smile, and said:

"A perfect harmony seems to prevail in your Musketeers, sire, between the leader and the soldiers, which must be good for the service, and advantageous for all."

"Now he will play me some dog's trick or other, and that immediately," said Treville; "there is no possibility of getting the last word with such a man. But let us be quick, the King may change his mind presently; and, at all events, it is more difficult to replace a man in the Fort l'Eveque, or the Bastile, who has got out, than to keep a prisoner who is in."

M. de Treville made his entrance triumphantly into the Fort l'Eveque, whence he delivered the Musketeer, whose peaceful indifference had not for a moment abandoned him.

The first time he saw d'Artagnan, "You have come off well," said he to him; "there is your Jussac thrust paid for. There still remains that of Bernajoux, but you must not be too confident."

As to the rest, M. de Treville had good reason to mistrust the Cardinal, and to think that all was not over, for scarcely had the captain closed the door after him, than his Eminence said to the King:

"Now that we are at length by ourselves, we will, if your Majesty pleases, converse seriously. Sire, Buckingham has been in Paris five days, and only left it this morning."

CHAPTER XVI.

THE KEEPER OF THE SEALS.

It is impossible to form an idea of the impression these few words made upon Louis XIII. He grew pale and red alternately, and the Cardinal saw at once that he had recovered, by a single blow, all the ground he had lost.

"Buckingham in Paris!" cried he, "and what does he come to do there?"

"To conspire, no doubt, with your enemies the Huguenots and the Spaniards."

"No! no! to conspire against my honor, with Mme. de Chevreuse, Madame de Longueville, and the Condes."

"Oh! sire, what an idea! The Queen is too prudent, and, besides, loves your Majesty too well; yet, whatever repugnance I may have to directing my mind to such a treason, your Majesty compels me to think of it. Madame de Lanney, whom, according to your Majesty's command, I have frequently interrogated, told me this morning that the night before last her Majesty sat up very late, that this morning she wept much, and that she was writing all day."

"That's it!" cried the King; "to him, no doubt. Cardinal, I must have the Queen's papers."

"I would, however, beg your Majesty to observe——"

"Do you then also join in betraying me, my lord, by thus always opposing my will? Are you also in concert with Spain and England, and Lady de Chevreuse and the Queen?"

"Sire," replied the Cardinal, sighing, "I thought I was secure from such a suspicion."

"Cardinal, you have heard me; I will have those letters."

"There is but one means."

"What is that?"

"That would be to charge M. de Seguier, the keeper of the seals, with this mission. The matters enters completely into the duties of his post."

"Let him be sent for instantly. I will go to the Queen."

And Louis XIII., opening the door of communication, passed

into the corridor which led to the apartments of Anna of Austria.

The Queen was in the midst of her women. In a corner was the Spanish camarista, Donna Estefana, who had followed her from Madrid. Madame Guemene was reading aloud, and everybody was listening to her with attention, with the exception of the Queen, who had, on the contrary, desired this reading in order that she might be able, whilst feigning to listen, to pursue the thread of her own thoughts.

These thoughts, gilded as they were by a last reflection of love, were not the less sad. Anna of Austria, deprived of the confidence of her husband, pursued by the hatred of the Premier, who could not pardon her for having repulsed a more tender feeling, having before her eyes the example of the Queen-mother, whom that hatred had tormented all her life, though Mary de Medici had begun by according to the Cardinal that sentiment which Anna of Austria always refused him; Anna had seen fall around her her most devoted servants, her most intimate confidants, her dearest favorites. Like those unfortunate persons endowed with a fatal gift, she brought misfortune upon everything she touched; her friendship was a fatal sign which called down persecution. Madame Chevreuse and Madame Vernet were exiled, and Laporte did not conceal from his mistress that he expected to be arrested every instant.

It was at the moment she was plunged in the deepest and darkest of these reflections, that the door of the chamber opened, and the King entered.

The reader was instantly silent, all the ladies rose, and there was a profound silence. As to the King, he made no demonstration of politeness, only stopping before the Queen.

"Madame," said he, "you are about to receive a visit from the Chancellor, who will communicate certain matters to you, with which I have charged him."

The unfortunate Queen, who was constantly threatened with divorce, exile, and trial even, turned pale under her rouge, and could not refrain from saying:

"But why this visit, sire? What can monsieur the Chancellor have to say to me that your Majesty could not say yourself?"

The King turned upon his heel without reply, and almost at the same instant the captain of the guards, M. de Guitaut, announced the visit of monsieur the Chancellor.

When the Chancellor appeared, the King had already gone out by another door.

The Chancellor entered, half smiling, half blushing. As we shall probably meet with him again in the course of our history, it would be quite as well for our readers to be made at once acquainted with him.

This Chancellor was a pleasant man. It was Des Roches le Masle, canon of Notre Dame, formerly valet de chambre to the Cardinal, who introduced him to his Eminence as a perfectly

devout man. The Cardinal trusted him, and found his advantage in it.

On leaving the convent, he entered into the magistracy, became president *a mortier* in the place of his uncle, embraced the Cardinal's party, which did not prove want of sagacity; became Chancellor, served his Eminence with zeal in his hatred against the Queen-mother, and his vengeance against Anna of Austria; stimulated the judges in the affair of Chalais; encouraged the essays of M. de Laffemas, *grand gibecier* of France; then, at length, invested with the entire confidence of the Cardinal, a confidence which he had so well earned, he received the singular commission for the execution of which he presented himself in the royal apartments.

The sovereign was still standing when he entered, but scarcely had she perceived him that she reseated herself, and made a sign to her women to resume their cushions and stools, and, with an air of supreme hauteur, said:

"What do you desire, and with what object do you present yourself here?"

"To make, madame, in the name of the King, and without prejudice to the respect which I have the honor to owe to your Majesty, a close perquisition into all your papers."

"How! a perquisition into my papers!—mine! Truly, this is an unworthy proceeding!"

"Be kind enough to pardon me, madame; but in this circumstance I am but the instrument which the King employs. Has not his Majesty just left you? and has he not himself desired you to prepare for this visit?"

"Examine, then, monsieur; I am a criminal, as it appears. Estefana, give the keys of my tables and my secretaries."

For the form's sake the Chancellor paid a visit to the pieces of furniture named, but he well knew that it was not in a piece of furniture that the Queen would place the important letter she had written in the course of the day.

When the Chancellor had opened and shut twenty times the drawers of the secretaires, it became necessary, whatever hesitation he might experience, it became necessary, I say to come to the conclusion of the affair—that is to say, to search the Queen herself. The Chancellor advanced towards Anna of Austria, and, with a very perplexed and embarrassed air—

"And now," said he, "it remains for me to make the principal perquisition."

"What is that?" asked the Queen, who did not understand, or, rather, was not willing to understand.

"His Majesty is certain that a letter has been written by you in the course of the day; he knows that it has not been sent to its address. This letter is not in your table-drawers, nor in your secretaire; and yet this letter must be somewhere."

"I will not suffer it! no, no, I would rather die!" cried the Queen, within whom the imperious blood of Spain and Austria began to rise.

The Chancellor made a profound reverence; then, with the intention quite patent of not drawing back a foot from the accomplishment of the commission with which he was charged, and as the attendant of an executioner might have done in the chamber of torture, he approached Anna of Austria, from whose eyes at the same instant sprang tears of rage.

The Queen was, as we have said, of great beauty. The commission might, then, pass for delicate; and the King had arrived, in his jealousy for Buckingham, at the point of being no longer jealous of any one.

Chancellor Seguier summoned all his resolution, and stretched forth his hands towards the place where the Queen had acknowledged the paper was to be found.

Anna of Austria made one step backward, became so pale that it might be said she was dying, and, leaning with her left hand, to keep herself from falling, upon a table behind her, she with her right hand drew the paper from her bosom, and held it out to the keeper of the seals.

"There, monsieur, there is that letter!" cried the Queen, with a broken and trembling voice; "take it, and deliver me from your odious presence."

It was nothing but a plan of attack against the Prime Minister. The Queen pressed her brother and the Emperor of Austria to appear to be wounded, as they really were, by the policy of Richelieu, the eternal object of which was the abasement of the house of Austria; to declare war against France, and, as a condition of peace, to insist upon the dismissal of the Cardinal; but as to love, there was not a single word about it in all the letter.

The King, quite delighted, inquired if the Premier was still at the Louvre; he was told that his Eminence awaited the orders of his Majesty in the business cabinet.

The King went straight to him.

"There, Duke," said he, "you were right and I was wrong; the whole intrigue is political, and there is not the least question of love in this said letter. But, on the other hand, there is abundant question of you."

The Premier took the letter, and read it with the greatest attention; then, when he had arrived at the end of it, he read it a second time.

"Well, your Majesty," said he, "you see how far my enemies go; they threaten you with two wars if you do not dismiss me. In your place, in truth, sire, I should yield to such powerful instances; and, on my part, it would be a real happiness to withdraw from public affairs."

"What's that you say, Duke?"

"I say, sire, that my health is sinking under these annoying struggles, and these never-ending labors. I say that, according to all probability, I shall not be able to undergo the fatigues of the siege of La Rochelle, and that it would be far better that you should appoint there, either M. de Conde, M. de Bassompierre, or some valiant gentleman whose business is war, and

not me, who am a churchman, and who am constantly turned aside from my real vocation to look after matters for which I have no aptitude. You would be the happier for it at home, sire, and I do not doubt you would be the greater for it abroad."

"Duke," said the King, "I understand you. Be satisfied, all who are named in that letter shall be punished as they deserve; and the Queen herself shall not be forgotten."

"What do you say, sire? God forbid that the Queen should suffer the least inconvenience or uneasiness on my account!"

"She has always believed me, sire, to be her enemy, although your Majesty can bear witness that I have always taken her part warmly, even against you. She is my enemy; but is not yours, sire; on the contrary, she is a devoted, submissive, and irreproachable wife; allow me, then, sire, to intercede for her with your Majesty."

"In what manner can I make advances first?"

"By doing a thing which you know will be agreeable to her."

"What is that?"

"Give a ball, for you know how much the Queen loves dancing. I will answer for it, her resentment will not hold out against such an attention."

"M. Cardinal, you know that I do not like mundane pleasures."

"The Queen will only be the more grateful to you, as she knows your antipathy for that amusement; besides, it will be an opportunity for her to wear those beautiful diamonds which you gave her recently, on her birthday, and with which she has since had no occasion to adorn herself."

"We shall see, Cardinal, we shall see," said the King, who in his joy at finding the Queen guilty of a crime which he cared little about, and innocent of a fault of which he had great dread, was ready to make up all differences with her; "we shall see, but, upon my honor, you are too indulgent towards her."

"Sire," said the Cardinal, "leave severity to your ministers; clemency is a royal virtue; employ it, and you will find you derive advantage from it."

A fête was so rare a thing for Poor Anna of Austria, that at this announcement, as the Cardinal had predicted, the last trace of her resentment disappeared, if not from her heart, at least from her countenance. She asked upon what day this fête would take place, but the King replied that he must consult the Cardinal upon that head.

In fact, every day the King asked the Cardinal when this fête should take place, and every day the Cardinal, under some pretense or other, deferred fixing it. Ten days passed away thus.

On the eighth day after the scene we have described, the Cardinal received a letter with the London stamp, which only contained these lines:

"I have them, but I am unable to leave London for want of money; send me five hundred pistoles, and four or five days after I have received them I shall be in Paris."

On the same day that the Cardinal received this letter, the King put his customary question to him.

Richelieu counted on his fingers, and said to himself:

"She will arrive, she says, four or five days after having received the money; it will require four or five days for the transmission of the money, four or five days for her to return, that makes ten days; now, allowing for contrary winds, accidents, and a woman's weakness, we cannot make it, altogether, less than twelve days."

"Well, Duke," said the King, "have you made your calculations?"

"Yes, sire, to-day is the 20th of September; the city sheriffs give a fête on the third of October. That will fall in wonderfully well; you will not appear to have gone out of your way to please the Queen."

Then the Cardinal added:

"By the way, sire, do not forget to tell her Majesty, the evening before the fête, that you should like to see how her diamond studs become her."

CHAPTER XVII.

THE BONACIEUX COUPLE.

It was the second time the Cardinal had mentioned these diamond studs to the King. Louis XIII. was struck with these repetitions, and began to fancy that this recommendation concealed some mystery.

He went then to the Queen, and, according to custom, accosted her with dignity. "There will shortly be a ball at the Hotel de Ville; I wish that, to do honor to our worthy sheriffs, you should appear at it in ceremonial costume, and particularly ornamented with the diamond studs which I gave you on your birthday. That is my answer."

The answer was terrible. Anna of Austria believed that Louis XIII. knew all, and that the Premier had persuaded him to employ this long dissimulation of seven or eight days, which, likewise, was characteristic. She became excessively pale, leant her beautiful hand upon a console, which hand appeared then like one of wax, and looking at the King, with terror in her eyes, she was unable to reply by a single syllable.

"You hear, madame," said the king, who enjoyed this embarrassment to its full extent, but without guessing its cause,—"You hear, madame?"

"Yes, sire, I hear," stammered the Queen.

"Then that is agreed," said the King, "and that is all I have to say to you."

"But on what day will this ball take place?" asked Anna of Austria.

Louis XIII. felt instinctively that he ought not to reply to

this question, the Queen having put it in an almost inaudible voice.

"Oh! very shortly, madame," said he, "but I do not precisely recollect the date of the day; I will ask the Cardinal."

"It was the Cardinal, then, who informed you of this fête?"

"Yes, madame," replied the astonished King; "but why do you ask that?"

"It was he who told you to desire me to appear there with these studs?"

"Well; and what does it signify whether it was he or I? Is there any crime in this request?"

"None!"

"That's well," said the King, retiring, "that's well, I depend upon you."

The Queen made a courtesy, less from etiquette than because her knees were sinking under her.

"I am lost," murmured the Queen, "lost! for the Cardinal knows all, and it is he who urges on the King, who as yet knows nothing, but will soon know everything. I am lost! my God! my God! my God!"

She knelt upon a cushion and prayed, with her head buried between her palpitating arms.

In fact, her position was terrible. Buckingham had returned to London, Mme. de Chevreuse was at Tours. More closely watched than ever, the Queen felt certain that one of her women betrayed her, without knowing how to tell which. Laporte could not leave the Louvre; she had not a soul in the world in whom she could confide.

Thus, whilst contemplating the misfortune which threatened her, and the abandonment in which she was left, she broke out into sobs and tears.

"Can I be of no service to your Majesty?" said all at once a voice full of sweetness and pity.

The Queen turned sharply round, for there could be no deception in the expression of that voice; it was a friend who spoke thus.

In fact, at one of the doors which opened into the Queen's apartment, appeared the pretty Mme. Bonacieux; she had been engaged in arranging the dresses and linen in a closet, when the King entered; she could not get out, and had heard all.

"You! oh heavens! you!" cried the Queen; "but look me in the face; I am betrayed on all sides; can I trust in you?"

"Oh! madame!" cried the young woman, falling on her knees, "upon my soul, I am ready to die for your Majesty!"

This expression sprang from the very bottom of the heart, and, like the first, there was no mistaking it.

"Yes," continued Mme. Bonacieux, "yes, there are traitors here; but by the holy Virgin, I swear that none is more devoted to your Majesty than I am. Those studs, which the King speaks of, you gave them to the Duke of Buckingham, did you not?

Those studs were in a little rosewood box, which he held under his arm? Am I deceived? Is it not so, madame?"

"Oh! my God!" murmured the Queen, whose teeth chattered with fright.

"Well, those studs," continued Mme. Bonacieux, "we must have them back again."

"Yes, without doubt, it must be so," cried the Queen, "but how am I to act? How can it be effected?"

"Some one must be sent to the Duke. Place confidence in me madame; I will find a messenger."

"But I must write."

"Oh, yes; that is indispensable. Two words from the hand of your Majesty and your own private seal."

"But these two words would bring about my condemnation, divorce, exile!"

"Yes, if they fell into infamous hands. But I will answer for these two words being delivered to their address."

"Oh! heaven! I must then place my life, my honor, my reputation, all in your hands?"

"Yes, yes, madame, you must, and I will save them all."

"But how—tell me at least, how?"

"My husband has been set at liberty these two or three days; I have not yet had time to see him again. He is a worthy, honest man, who entertains neither love nor hatred for anybody. He will do anything I wish; he will set out upon receiving an order from me, without knowing what he carries, and he will remit your Majesty's letter, without even knowing it is from your Majesty, to the address which shall be upon it."

The Queen ran to a little table, upon which were pens, ink, and paper; she wrote two lines, sealed the letter with her private seal, and gave it to Madame Bonacieux.

"And now," said the Queen, "we are forgetting one very necessary thing."

"What is that, madame?"

"Money."

Madame Bonacieux blushed.

"Yes, that is true," said she, "and I will confess to your Majesty that my husband——"

"Your husband has none; is that what you would say?"

"Oh! yes, he has some, but he is very avaricious, that is his fault. Nevertheless, let not your Majesty be uneasy, we will find means."

"And I have none, neither," said the Queen. "But wait a minute." She ran to her jewel-case, and said:

"Here is a ring of great value, as I have been assured; it came from my brother, the King of Spain; it is mine, and I am at liberty to dispose of it. Take this ring, make money of it, and let your husband set out."

Madame Bonacieux kissed the hands of the Queen, concealed the paper in the bosom of her dress, and disappeared with the lightness of a bird.

Ten minutes afterwards, she was at home.

She found Bonacieux alone: the poor man was restoring, with much trouble, order in his house, the furniture of which he had found mostly broken, and his chests and drawers mostly empty, justice not being one of the three things which King Solomon named as leaving no trace of their passage. As to the servant, she had run away at the moment of her master's arrest. Terror had had such an effect upon the poor girl, that she had never ceased walking from Paris till she got to Burgundy, her native place.

The married couple then, although they had not seen each other for eight days, and that during that time serious events had taken place in which both were concerned, accosted each other with a degree of pre-occupation; nevertheless, M. Bonacieux manifested real joy, and advanced towards his wife with open arms.

Mme. Bonacieux presented her cheek to him.

"Let us talk a little," said she.

"How!" said Bonacieux, astonished.

"Yes; I have something of great importance to tell you, upon which our future fortune depends."

"The complexion of our fortune has changed very much since I saw you, Mme. Bonacieux, and I should not be surprised if, in the course of a few months, it were to excite the envy of many folks."

"Particularly if you obey the instructions I am about to give to you."

"To me?"

"Yes, to you. There is a good and holy action to be performed, and much money to be gained at the same time."

Mme. Bonacieux knew that when naming money to her husband, she attacked him on his weak side. But a man, were he even a mercer, when he has talked for ten minutes with the Cardinal de Richelieu, is no longer the same man.

"About how much, pray?"

"A thousand pistoles, perhaps."

"Humph! What is to be done?"

"You must set out immediately; I will give you a paper which you must not part with on any account, and which you will deliver into the proper hands."

"And where am I to go to?"

"London."

"I go to London? You are joking, I have no business in London."

"But others require that you should go there."

"But who are those others? I warn you that I will never again work in the dark, and that I will know not only to what I expose myself, but for whom I expose myself."

"An illustrious person sends you, an illustrious person awaits you; the recompense will exceed your expectations, that is all I promise you."

"More intrigues! nothing but intrigues! Thank you, madame, I am aware of them now; the Cardinal has enlightened me on that head."

"The Cardinal!" cried Mme. Bonacieux; "have you seen the Cardinal?"

"He sent for me," answered the mercer, proudly.

"And you went! you imprudent man!"

"Well, I can't say I had much choice in going or not going, for I was taken to him between two guards. I must also confess that as I did not know his Eminence, if I had been able to have declined the visit, I should have been delighted to have done so."

"He ill-treated you, then? he threatened you?"

"He gave me his hand, and he called me his friend—his friend! do you hear that, madame? I am the friend of the great Cardinal! the great man whom I have the honor to serve."

"You serve the Cardinal?"

"Yes, madame, and as his servant, I will not allow you to be concerned in plots against the safety of the state, or to assist in the intrigues of a woman who is not a Frenchwoman, and who has a Spanish heart. Fortunately, we have the great Cardinal, who vigilant eye watches over and penetrates to the bottom of hearts."

Bonacieux was repeating, word for word, a sentence which he had heard the Count de Rochefort make use of; but the poor wife, who had reckoned on her husband, and who, in that hope, had answered for him to the Queen, did not tremble the less, both at the danger into which she had nearly cast herself, and at the helpless state to which she was reduced. Nevertheless, knowing the weakness of her husband, and more particularly his cupidity, she did not despair of bringing him round to her purpose.

"Ah! you are a Cardinalist! then, monsieur, are you?" cried she, "and you serve the party who ill-treat your wife and insult your Queen?"

"Private interests are as nothing before the interests of all. I am for those who save the state," said Bonacieux, emphatically.

This was another of Count de Rochefort's sentences which he had retained, and which he sought on occasion to make use of.

"And what do you know about the state you talk of?" said Mme. Bonacieux, shrugging her shoulders. "Be satisfied with being a plain, straightforward bourgeois, and turn your attention to that side which holds out the greatest advantages."

"Eh! eh!" said Bonacieux, slapping a plump, round bag, which returned a chink of money; what do you think of this, madame preacher?"

"Where does that money come from?"

"Can't you guess?"

"From the Cardinal?"

"From him, and from my friend, the Count de Rochefort."

"The Count de Rochefort! why, it was he who carried me off!"

"Perhaps it was, madame."

"And you receive money from that man! You meddle with politics do you! And still more, with Cardinalist politics! Why you are selling yourself, body and soul, to the devil, for money!"

"No, but to the Cardinal."

"It's the same thing!" cried the young woman. "Who says Richelieu says Satan!"

"Hold your tongue! hold your tongue, madam; we may be overheard."

"Yes you are right, I should be ashamed for any to know your baseness."

"But what do you require of me, then; come, let us see!"

"I have told you; you must set out instantly, monsieur; if you do not, I will have you arrested by the Queen's orders, and I will have you placed in that Bastile which you dread so much."

Bonacieux fell into a profound reflection; he turned the two angers in his brain, that of the Cardinal and that of the Queen; that of the Cardinal predominated enormously.

"Have me arrested on the part of the Queen," said he, "and I will appeal to his Eminence."

At once, Mme. Bonacieux saw that she had gone too far, and she was terrified at having communicated so much. She for a moment contemplated with terror, that stupid countenance, impressed with the invincible resolution of a fool overcome by fear.

"Well, be it so!" said she. "Perhaps, when all is considered, you are right: in the long run, a man knows more about politics than a woman does, particularly such as like you, Bonacieux, have conversed with the Cardinal. And yet it is very hard," added she, "that a man upon whose affection I thought I might depend, treats me thus unkindly, and will not comply with any of my fancies."

"That is because your fancies might lead you too far," replied the triumphant Bonacieux, "and I mistrust them."

"Well, I will give it up, then," said the young woman, sighing; "it is as well as it is, say no more about it."

"Yes, at least you should tell me what I should have to do in London," replied Bonacieux, who remembered a little too late, that Rochefort had desired him to endeavor to obtain his wife's secrets.

"It is of no use for you to know anything about it," said the young woman, whom an instinctive mistrust now impelled to draw back; "it was about one of those purchases that interest women, a purchase by which much might have been gained."

But the more the young woman excused herself, the more important Bonacieux conceived the secret to be which she declined to communicate to him. He resolved, then, that instant to hasten to the residence of the Count de Rochefort, and tell him that the Queen was seeking for a messenger to send to London.

"Pardon me for leaving you, my dear Madame Bonacieux," said he; "but not knowing you would come to see me, I had made an engagement with a friend; I shall soon return, and if you will wait only a few minutes for me, as soon as I have concluded my business with that friend, for it is growing late, I will come and conduct you back to the Louvre."

"Thank you, monsieur, you are not obliging enough to be of any use to me whatever," replied Madame Bonacieux; "I shall return very safely to the Louvre by myself."

Bonacieux kissed his wife's hand and set off at a quick pace.

"Well!" said Mme. Bonacieux when her husband had shut the street door, and she found herself alone, "there wanted nothing to complete that poor creature but being a Cardinalist! And I, who have answered for him to the Queen! I, who have promised my poor mistress! Ah! my God! my God! she will take me for one of those wretches with whom the palace swarms, and which are placed about her as spies! Ah! M. Bonacieux! I never did love you much, but now, it is worse than ever; I hate you! and by my word, you shall pay for this!"

At the moment she spoke these words, a rap on the ceiling made her raise her head, and a voice which reached her through the plaster, cried:

"Dear Mme. Bonacieux, open the little passage-door for me, and I will come down to you."

CHAPTER XVIII.

LOVER AND HUSBAND.

"Ah! madame," said d'Artagnan, as he entered by the door which the young woman had opened for him, "allow me to tell you, that you have a bad sort of a husband there!"

"You have then overheard our conversation?" asked Madame Bonacieux, eagerly, and looking at d'Artagnan with much uneasiness.

"The whole of it."

"And what did you understand by what you heard us say?"

"A thousand things; in the first place that, fortunately, your husband is a simpleton and a fool; in the next place you are in trouble, of which I am very glad, as it gives me an opportunity of placing myself at your service, and God knows I am ready to throw myself into the fire for you; and that the Queen wants a brave, intelligent, devoted man to make a journey to London for her. I have, at least, two of the qualities you stand in need of—and here I am."

Mme. Bonacieux made no reply, but her heart beat with joy, and secret hope shone in her eyes.

"And what pledge can you give me," asked she, "if I consent to confide this message to you?"

"My love for you. Speak! command! What must I do?"

"Heavens!" murmured the young woman, "ought I to confide such a secret to you, monsieur? You are almost a boy!"

"I suppose, then, you require some one to answer for me?"

"I admit that that would reassure me greatly."

"Do you know Athos? Porthos? Aramis? three of the King's Musketeers. Do you know Treville, their captain? You are not afraid that he would betray you for the sake of the Cardinal?"

"Oh! no, certainly."

"Well, reveal your secret to him, and ask him, whether, however important, however valuable, however terrible it may be, you may not safely confide it to me."

"But this secret is not mine, and I cannot reveal it in this manner."

"Why, you were going to confide it to M. Bonacieux," said d'Artagnan, with an offended tone.

"As we confide a letter to the hollow of a tree, to the wing of a pigeon, or to the collar of a dog."

"And yet me; you see plainly that I love you."

"You say so."

"Then put me to the proof."

Madame Bonacieux looked at the young man, restrained for a minute by a last hesitation; but there was such an ardor in his eyes, such persuasion in his voice, that she felt herself drawn on to place confidence in him. Besides, she was in one of those circumstances in which everything must be risked for the sake of everything. The Queen might also be as much injured by too much discretion as by too much confidence—and—let us admit it, the involuntary sentiment which she felt for her young protector, compelled her to speak.

"Listen," said she, "I yield to your protestations, I yield to your assurances. But I swear to you, before God who hears us, that if you betray me, and my enemies pardon me, I will kill myself, whilst accusing you of my death."

"And I, I swear to you before God, madame," said d'Artagnan, "that if I am taken whilst accomplishing the orders you give me, I will die sooner than do anything or say anything, that will compromise any one."

Then the young woman confided to him the terrible secret of which chance had already communicated to him a part, in front of the *Samaritaine*.

This was their mutual declaration of love.

D'Artagnan was radiant with joy and pride. This secret which he possessed, this woman whom he loved! Confidence and love made him a giant.

"I will go," said he, "I will go at once."

"How! you will go!" said Mme. Bonacieux; "and your regiment, your captain?"

"By my soul, you have made me forget all that, dear Constance! Yes, you are right, I must obtain leave of absence. I will go this very evening to M. de Treville, whom I will request to ask this favor for me of his brother-in-law, M. Desessarts."

"But still, there is another thing."

"What is that?" asked d'Artagnan, seeing that Mme. Bonacieux hesitated to continue.

"You have, perhaps, no money?"

"'Perhaps' is too strong," said d'Artagnan, smiling.

"Then," replied Mme. Bonacieux, opening a cupboard and taking from it the very bag which half an hour before her husband had patted so affectionately, "take this bag."

"The Cardinal's!" cried d'Artagnan, breaking into a loud laugh, he having heard, as may be remembered, thanks to his perforated floor, every syllable of the conversation between the mercer and his wife.

"The Cardinal's," replied Madame Bonacieux; "you see it makes a very respectable appearance."

"By Jove!" cried d'Artagnan, "it will be a doubly amusing affair to save the Queen with the Cardinal's money!"

"You are an amiable and a charming young man!" said Mme. Bonacieux. "Be assured you will not find her Majesty ungrateful."

"Oh! I am already more than recompensed!" cried d'Artagnan.

"I love you; you permit me to tell you that I do; that is already more happiness than I dared to hope for."

"Silence!" said Mme. Bonacieux, starting. "Someone is talking in the street. My husband! Oh! yes; I recognized it!"

"Then you must come up into my room."

"Let us go, then, I place full confidence in you, my friend!"

D'Artagnan drew back the bolt with precaution, and both, light as shadows, glided through the interior door into the passage, ascended the stairs as quietly as possible, and entered d'Artagnan's apartments.

Once in his apartment, for greater security, the young man barricaded the door. They both went up to the window, and, through a slit in the shutter, they saw M. Bonacieux talking with a man in a cloak.

At the sight of this man, d'Artagnan started, half drew his sword, and sprang towards the door.

It was the man of Meung.

"What are you going to do?" cried Mme. Bonacieux; "you will ruin us all!"

"But I have sworn to kill that man!" said d'Artagnan.

"At this time your life is devoted, and does not belong to you! In the name of the Queen I forbid you to throw yourself into any danger which is foreign to that of your voyage!"

"And do you command nothing in your own name?"

"In my name?" said Mme. Bonacieux, with great emotion; "in my name I beg of you! But listen; they appear to be speaking of me."

D'Artagnan drew near the window, and listened.

M. Bonacieux had opened his door, and seeing the apartment

empty, had returned to the man in the cloak, whom he had left alone for an instant.

"She is gone," said he; "she must be gone back to the Louvre."

"You are sure," replied the stranger, "that she did not suspect the intention you went out with?"

"No," replied Bonacieux, with a self-sufficient air, "she is too superficial a woman."

"Let us walk into your apartment; we shall be better there than in the doorway."

"Oh! goodness!" whispered Mme. Bonacieux, "we shall hear no more."

"On the contrary," said d'Artagnan, "we shall hear the better."

D'Artagnan raised the three or four boards which made another Dionysius's ear of his chamber, spread a carpet, went down upon his knees, and made a sign to Mme. Bonacieux to do as he did, stooping down towards the opening.

"And you think that your wife——?" said Rochefort.

"Is returned to the Louvre."

"Without speaking to any one but yourself?"

"I am sure of it."

"Please to understand, that is an important point."

"Then the news I brought you is valuable?"

"Very, my dear Bonacieux; the Cardinal will be pleased. Are you sure, that in her conversation with you, your wife mentioned no proper names?"

"No; she only told me she wished to send me to London, to further the interests of an illustrious personage."

"Oh! the traitor!" murmured Mme. Bonacieux.

"Silence!" whispered d'Artagnan, taking a hand, which, without thinking of it, she suffered him to retain.

"Never mind," continued the man in the cloak; "it was very silly of you not to have feigned to accept the mission; you would now be in possession of the letter; the state, which is now threatened, would be safe; and you——"

"And I?"

"Well, you! The Cardinal would have given you letters of nobility."

"Did he tell you so?"

"Yes, I know that he meant to afford you that agreeable surprise."

"Be satisfied," replied Bonacieux; "my wife adores me, and there is still plenty of time. I will go to the Louvre, I will ask for my wife, tell her I have reflected upon the matter, renew the affair, obtain the letter, and run directly to the Cardinal's."

"Well! begone then! make all possible haste: I will shortly come back to learn the result of your plan."

The Count went out.

A terrible howling interrupted these reflections of d'Artagnan and Mme. Bonacieux. It was her husband, who had discovered

the disappearance of his money bag, and was screaming out, "Thieves! thieves!"

"Oh! good God," cried Mme. Bonacieux, "he will arouse the whole quarter."

Bonacieux cried for a long time; but as such cries, on account of their frequency, did not attract much notice in the Rue des Fossoyeurs, and as lately the mercer's house had not been in very good repute, finding that nobody came, he went out, crying aloud, his voice being heard fainter and fainter, in the direction of the Rue du Bac.

"Now he is gone, it is your turn to get out," said Mme. Bonacieux: "courage, my friend, but, above all, prudence, and think what you owe to the Queen!"

"To her and to you!" cried d'Artagnan. "Be satisfied, lovely Constance. I shall prove worthy of her gratitude; but shall I likewise return worthy of your love?"

The young woman only replied by the beautiful glow which mounted to her cheeks. A few seconds after d'Artagnan went out in his turn, enveloped likewise in a large cloak, which ill-concealed the sheath of a long sword.

Mme. Bonacieux followed him with her eyes, with that long, fond look with which a woman accompanies the man she loves; but when he had turned the angle of the street, she fell on her knees, and clasping her hands—

"Oh! my God!" cried she, "protect the Queen, protect me!"

CHAPTER XIX.

PLAN OF THE CAMPAIGN.

D'Artagnan went straight to Treville's. He had reflected that in a few minutes the Cardinal would be warned by this cursed agent, and he judged, with reason, he had not a moment to lose.

The heart of the young man overflowed with joy. An opportunity presented itself to him in which there would be both glory and money to be gained, and, as a far higher encouragement still, which had brought him into close intimacy with a woman he adored. This chance did then for him, at once, more than he would have dared to ask of Providence.

M. de Treville was in his salon with his habitual court of gentlemen. D'Artagnan, who was known as a familiar of the house, went straight to his cabinet, and sent word to him that he wished to see him upon an affair of importance.

D'Artagnan had been there scarcely five minutes when M. de Treville entered. At the first glance, and by the joy which was painted on his countenance, the worthy captain plainly perceived that something fresh and extraordinary was on foot.

All the way he came, d'Artagnan was consulting with himself whether he should place confidence in M. de Treville, or whether he should only ask him to give him *carte blanche* for a second

affair. But M. de Treville had always been so perfectly his friend, had always been so devoted to the King and Queen, and hated the Cardinal so cordially, that the young man resolved to tell him everything.

"Did you ask for me, my young friend?" said M. de Treville.

"Yes, monsieur," said d'Artagnan, "you will pardon me, I hope, for having disturbed you, when you know the importance of my business; the honor, perhaps the life of the Queen."

"What do you say?" asked M. de Treville, glancing round to see if they were alone, and then fixing his interrogative look upon d'Artagnan.

"I say, monsieur, that chance has rendered me master of a secret——"

"Which you will keep, I hope, young man, sacred as your life."

"But which I must impart to you, monsieur, for you alone can assist me in the mission I have just received from her Majesty."

"Is this secret your own?"

"No, monsieur, it is her Majesty's."

"Are you authorized by her Majesty to communicate it to me?"

"No, monsieur, for on the contrary, I am desired to preserve the profoundest mystery."

"Why, then, are you about to betray it with respect to me?"

"Because, as I said, without you I can do nothing, and I was afraid that you would refuse me the favor I am come to ask, if you were not acquainted with the object for which I requested it of you."

"Keep your secret, young man, and tell me what you wish."

"I wish you to obtain for me, from M. Desessarts, leave of absence for a fortnight, this very night."

"Leaving Paris?"

"I am going on a mission to London."

"Has any one an interest in preventing your arriving there?"

"The Cardinal, I believe, would give anything in the world to prevent my success."

"And you are going alone?"

"I am going alone."

"In that case you will not get beyond Bondy; I tell you so, by the word of Treville. You will be waylaid."

"And I shall die in the performance of my duty."

"Yes, but please to recollect your mission will not be accomplished."

"That is true!" replied d'Artagnan.

"You may take my word," continued Treville, "in enterprises of this kind, in order that one may arrive, more must set out."

"Ah! you are right, monsieur," said d'Artagnan; "but you know Athos, Porthos, and Aramis, and you know if I can dispose of them."

"Without confiding to them the secret which I was not willing to know?"

"We are sworn, once, forever, implicit confidence and devotedness against all proof; besides, you can tell them that you have full confidence in me, and they will not be more incredulous than you."

"I can send to each of them leave of absence for a fortnight, that is all. Athos, whose wound still gives him inconvenience, to go to the waters of Forges; to Porthos and Aramis to accompany their friend, whom they are not willing to abandon in such a painful position. The sending of their leave of absence will be proof enough that I authorize their voyage."

"Thanks, monsieur! you are a hundred times kind!"

"Have you any money?"

D'Artagnan tapped the bag he had in his pocket.

"Enough?" asked M. de Treville.

"Three hundred pistoles."

"Oh! plenty; that would carry you to the end of the world; begone, then."

D'Artagnan bowed to M. de Treville, who held out his hand to him; d'Artagnan pressed it with a respect mixed with gratitude. Since his first arrival at Paris, he had had constant occasion to honor this excellent man, whom he had always found worthy, loyal, and great.

His first visit was for Aramis, at whose residence he had not been since the famous evening on which he had followed Madame Bonacieux. Still further, he had seen the young Musketeer but seldom, but every time he had seen him, he had remarked a deep sadness imprinted on his countenance.

He found Aramis this evening, sitting up, but melancholy and thoughtful d'Artagnan risked a question or two about this prolonged melancholy; Aramis pleaded as his excuse a commentary upon the eighteenth chapter of St. Augustin, that he was forced to write in Latin, for the following week, and which occupied him a good deal.

After the two friends had been chatting a few instants, a servant from Treville entered, bring a sealed packet.

"What is that?" asked Aramis.

"The leave of absence master applied for," replied the lackey.

"For me!"

"Hold your tongue, and take it," said d'Artagnan. "And you, my friend, there is a half-pistole for your trouble; tell M. de Treville that M. Aramis is very much obliged to him. Go."

The lackey bowed to the ground and departed.

"What does all this mean?" asked Aramis.

"Pack up all you want for a fortnight's journey, and follow me."

"But I cannot leave Paris, just now, without knowing——"

"What is become of her? I suppose you mean——?" continued d'Artagnan.

"Become of whom?" replied Aramis.

"The lady who was here, the lady of the embroidered handkerchief."

"Who told you there was a lady here?" replied Aramis, becoming as pale as death.

"I saw her."

"And you know who she is?"

"Well, I think I can give a pretty good guess, at least."

"Then," said Aramis, "since you appear to know so many things, can you tell me what is become of that lady?"

"I presume that she is gone back to Tours."

"To Tours, yes, that may be; you evidently know her. But why did she return to Tours without telling me anything about it?"

"Because she was in fear of being arrested."

"Why did she not write to me then?"

"Because she was afraid of compromising you."

"D'Artagnan, you restore me to life," cried Aramis. "I fancied myself despised, betrayed. I was so delighted to see her again! I could not have believed she would risk her liberty for me, and yet for what other cause could she have returned to Paris?"

"For the cause, which, to-day, carries us to England."

"You'll know it some day, Aramis; but, at present, I must beg leave to imitate the discretion of the doctor's niece. Now to Athos's residence, and I beg you to make haste, for we have lost much time already. Inform Bazin."

"Will Bazin go with us?" asked Aramis.

"Perhaps so. At all events, it is best that he should follow us to Athos's."

Aramis called Bazin, and after having ordered him to join them at Athos's residence: "Let us go, then," said he, taking his cloak, sword, and three pistols, opening uselessly two or three drawers to see if he could not find some stray coin or other.

When well assured this search was superfluous, he followed d'Artagnan, wondering to himself how this young guardsman should know so well who the lady was to whom he had given hospitality, and that he should know better than he did what was become of her.

And, at ease on this important point, Aramis continued his road with d'Artagnan, and both soon arrived at Athos's dwelling.

They found him holding his leave of absence in one hand, and M. de Treville's note in the other.

"Can you explain to me what this leave of absence and this letter, which I have just received mean?" said the astonished Athos——'My dear Athos, I wish, as your health absolutely requires it, that you should rest for a fortnight. Go, then, and take the waters of Forges, or any that may be more agreeable to you, and re-establish yourself as quickly as possible.—Your affectionate De Treville.'"

"Well; this leave of absence and that letter mean that you must follow me, Athos."

"To the waters of Forges?"

"There or elsewhere."

"In the King's service?"

"Either the King's or the Queen's; are we not their Majesties' servants?"

At that moment Porthos entered.

"Here!" said he; "here is a strange thing that has happened! Since when, I wonder, in the Musketeers, did they grant men leave of absence without its being asked for?"

"Since," said d'Artagnan, "they have friends who ask it for them."

"Oh!" said Porthos, "it appears there's something fresh afoot?"

"Yes, we are going——" said Aramis.

"To London, gentlemen," said d'Artagnan.

"To London!" cried Porthos; "and what the devil are we going to do in London?"

"That is what I am not at liberty to tell you, gentlemen; you must trust to me."

"But, in order to go to London, a man should have some money; and I have none."

"Nor I," said Aramis.

"Nor I," said Porthos.

"Well, I have," added d'Artagnan, pulling out his treasure from his pocket, and placing it on the table. "There are in this bag three hundred pistoles. Let each take seventy-five, which will be quite enough to take us to London and back. Besides, we may be sure that all of us will not arrive at London. Some will be left on the road."

"What is this, then, a campaign upon which we are entering?"

"And a most dangerous one. I give you fair notice."

"Ah! ah! but if we do risk being killed," said Porthos, "at least I should like to know what for."

"You would be much the wiser!" said Athos.

"And yet," said Aramis, "I am somewhat of Porthos's opinion."

"Is the King accustomed to give you such reasons? No. He says to you, very simply: 'Gentlemen, there is fighting going on in Gascony or in Flanders; go and fight;' and you go there. Why? You need give yourselves no uneasiness about that."

"D'Artagnan is right," said Athos; "here are our three leaves of absence, which came from M. de Treville; and here are three hundred pistoles, which came from I don't know where. So let us go and get killed where we are told to go. Is life worth the trouble of so many questions? D'Artagnan, I am ready to follow you."

"And I," said Porthos.

"And I, also," said Aramis. "And, indeed, I am not sorry to quit Paris; I stood in need of a little amusement."

"Well, you will have amusement enough, gentlemen, be assured," said d'Artagnan.

"And, now, when are we to go?" asked Athos.

"Immediately," replied d'Artagnan; "we have not a minute to lose."

"Hillo! Grimaud, Planchet, Mousqueton, Bazin!" cried the four young men, calling their lackeys, "clean my boots, and fetch the horses from the barracks."

Each Musketeer was accustomed to leave, at the barracks, his own horse and that of his lackey.

Planchet, Girmaud, Mousqueton, and Bazin set off at full speed.

"Now let us lay down the plan of the campaign," said Porthos. "Where do we go first?"

"To Calais," said d'Artagnan; "that is the most direct line to London. I am the bearer of a letter. I have not, and I cannot make copies of that letter, because it is sealed; we must then as it appears to me, travel in company. This letter is here, in this pocket;" and he pointed to the pocket which contained the letter. "If I should be killed, one of you must take it, and pursue the route; if he be killed, it will be another's turn, and so on; provided a single one arrives, that is all that is required."

"Bravo, d'Artagnan! your opinion is mine," cried Athos. "Besides, we must be consistent; I am going to take the waters, you will accompany me; instead of taking the medical waters of Forges, I go and take sea water; I am free to do so. If any one wishes to stop us, I will show M. de Treville's letter, and you will show your leaves of absence; if we are attacked, we will defend ourselves; if we are tried, we will stoutly maintain that we were only anxious to dip ourselves a certain number of times in the sea. They would have an easy bargain of four isolated men whereas; four men together make a troop. We will arm our four lackeys with pistols and musketoons; if they send an army out against us, we will give battle, and the survivor, as d'Artagnan says, will carry the letter."

"Well said," cried Aramis; "you don't often speak, Athos; but when you do speak, it is like Saint John of the Golden Mouth. I agree to Athos's plan. And you, Porthos?"

"I agree to it, too," said Porthos, "if d'Artagnan approves of it. D'Artagnan being bearer of the letter, is naturally the head of the enterprise; let him decide, and we will execute."

"Well!" said d'Artagnan; "I decide that we should adopt Athos's plan, and that we set off in half an hour."

"Agreed!" shouted the three Musketeers in chorus.

And every one, stretching out his hand to the bag, took his seventy-five pistoles and made his preparations to set out at the time appointed.

CHAPTER XX.

PLEASANT TRAVELLING.

At two o'clock in the morning, our four adventurers left Paris by the barrier St. Denis; as long as it was dark they remained silent; in spite of themselves they felt the influence of the obscurity, and apprehended ambushes everywhere.

With the first rays of the sun their tongues became loosened; with day their gayety revived; it was like the eve of a battle, the heart beat, the eyes laughed, and they felt that the life they were perhaps going to lose, was, after all, worth something.

Besides, the appearance of the caravan was formidable; the black horses of the Musketeers, their martial carriage, with the squadron-like step of these noble companions of the soldier, would have betrayed the most strict incognito. The lackeys followed, armed to the teeth.

All went well till they arrived at Chantilly, which place they reached about eight o'clock in the morning. They stood in need of breakfast; and alighted at the door of an auberge, recommended by a sign representing St. Martin giving half his cloak to a poor man. They ordered the lackeys not to unsaddle the horses, and to hold themselves in readiness to set off again immediately.

They entered the common room and placed themselves at table. A gentleman, who had just arrived by the route of Dammartin, was seated at the same table, and was taking his breakfast. He opened the conversation by talking of rain and fine weather; the travellers replied, he drank to their good health, and the travellers returned his politeness.

But at the moment Mousqueton came to announce that the horses were ready, and they were rising from table, the stranger proposed to Porthos to drink the health of the Cardinal. Porthos replied that he asked no better, if the stranger in his turn would drink the health of the King. The stranger cried that he acknowledged no other ruler but his Eminence. Porthos told him he was drunk, and the stranger drew his sword.

"You have committed a piece of folly," said Athos, "but it can't be helped; there is no drawing back; kill the fellow, and rejoin us as soon as you can."

And all three mounted their horses, and set out at a good pace whilst Porthos was promising his adversary to perforate him with all the thrusts known in the fencing schools.

"There goes one!" cried Athos, at the end of five hundred paces.

"But why did that man attack Porthos, rather than any other of us?" asked Aramis.

"Because Porthos talking louder than the rest, he took him for the leader of the party," said d'Artagnan.

"I always said that this cadet from Gascony was a well of wisdom," murmured Athos.

And the travellers continued their route.

At Beauvais they stopped two hours, as well to breathe their horses a little, as to wait for Porthos. At the end of the two hours, as Porthos did not come, and as they heard no news of him, they resumed their journey.

At a league from Beauvais, where the road was confined between two high banks, they fell in with eight or ten men who, taking advantage of the road being unpaved in this spot, appeared to be employed in digging holes and filling up the ruts with mud.

Aramis, not liking to soil his boots with this artificial mortar, apostrophized them rather sharply. Athos wished to restrain him, but it was too late. The laborers began to jeer the travellers, and by their insolence disturbed the equanimity even of Athos, who urged on his horse against one of them.

The men all immediately drew back to the ditch, from which each took a concealed musket; the result was that our seven travellers were outnumbered in weapons. Aramis received a ball, which passed through his shoulder, and Mousqueton another ball which lodged in the fleshy part which prolongs the lower portion of the loins. Mousqueton alone fell from his horse, not because he was severely wounded, but from not being able to see the wound, he judged it to be more serious than it really was.

"It is an ambuscade!" shouted d'Artagnan, "don't waste a charge! forward!"

Aramis, wounded as he was, seized the mane of his horse, which carried him on with the others. Mousqueton's horse rejoined them, and galloped by the side of his companions.

"That will serve us for a relay," said Athos.

"I would rather have had a hat," said d'Artagnan, "mine was carried away by a ball. By my faith, it is very fortunate that the letter was not in it."

"Well, but they'll kill poor Porthos when he comes up," said Aramis.

"If Porthos were on his legs, he would have rejoined us by this time," said Athos, "my opinion is that when they came to the point, the drunken man proved to be sober enough."

They continued at their best speed for two hours, although the horses were so fatigued, that it was to be feared they would soon decline the service.

The travellers had chosen cross-roads, in the hope that they might meet with less interruption; but at Crevecœur, Aramis declared he could proceed no farther. In fact, it required all the courage which he concealed beneath his elegant form and polished manners to bear him so far. He every minute grew more pale, and they were obliged to support him on his horse. They lifted him off, at the door of a cabaret, left Bazin with him, who besides, in a skirmish, was more embarrassing than useful, and set forward again in the hope of sleeping at Amiens.

"Zounds!" said Athos, as soon as they were again in motion, "reduced to two masters and Grimaud and Planchet! I won't

be their dupe, I will answer for it; I will neither open my mouth nor draw my sword between this and Calais. I swear by——"

"Don't waste time in swearing," said d'Artagnan, "let us gallop, if our horses will consent to it."

And the travellers buried their rowels in their horses' flanks, who thus vigorously stimulated, recovered their energies. They arrived at Amiens at midnight, and alighted at the auberge of the Lis d'Or.

The host had the appearance of as honest a man as any on earth; he received the travellers with his candlestick in one hand and his cotton night-cap in the other; he wished to lodge the two travellers each in a pleasant chamber, but, unfortunately, these charming chambers were at the opposite extremities of the hotel, and d'Artagnan and Athos declined them. The host replied that he had no other worthy of their excellencies; but his guests declared they would sleep in the common chamber, each upon a mattress, which might be thrown upon the ground. The host insisted, but the travellers were firm, and he was obliged to comply with their wishes.

They had just prepared their beds and barricaded their door within, when some one knocked at the yard-shutter; they demanded who was there, and, upon recognizing the voices of their lackeys, opened the shutter.

In fact, it was Planchet and Grimaud.

"Grimaud can take care of the horses," said Planchet; "if you are willing, gentlemen, I will sleep across your doorway, and you will then be certain that nobody can come to you."

"And what will you sleep upon?" said d'Artagnan.

"Here is my bed," replied Planchet, producing a bundle of straw.

"Come, then," said d'Artagnan, "you are right; mine host's face does not please me at all, it is too civil by half."

"Nor me," said Athos.

Planchet got up through the window, and installed himself across the doorway, whilst Grimaud went and shut himself up in the stable, undertaking that, by five o'clock in the morning, and he and the four horses should be ready.

The night passed off quietly enough, it is true; till about two o'clock in the morning, when somebody endeavored to open the door, but as Planchet woke in an instant, and cried, "Who is there?" this same somebody replied he was mistaken, and went away.

At four o'clock in the morning, there was a terrible riot in the stables. Grimaud had tried to waken the stable-boys, and the stable-boys had set upon him and beaten him. When they opened the window they saw the poor lad lying senseless, with his head split by a blow with a fork-handle.

Planchet went down into the yard, and proceeded to saddle the horses. But the horses were all knocked up. Mousqueton's horse, which had travelled for five or six hours without a rider the day before, alone might have been able to pursue the jour-

ney; but, by an inconceivable error, a veterinary surgeon, who had been sent for, as it appeared, to bleed one of the host's horses, had bled Mousqueton's.

This began to be annoying. All these successive accidents were, perhaps, the result of chance; but they might, quite as probably, be the fruits of a plot. Athos and d'Artagnan went out, whilst Planchet was sent to inquire if there were not three horses to be sold in the neighborhood. At the door stood two horses, fresh, strong, and fully equipped. These would just have suited them. He asked where the masters of them were, and was informed that they had passed the night in the auberge, and were then settling with the master.

Athos went down to pay the reckoning, whilst d'Artagnan and Planchet stood at the street-door. The host was in a lower and back chamber, to which Athos was requested to go.

Athos entered without the least mistrust, and took out two pistoles to pay the bill. The host was alone, seated before his desk, one of the drawers of which was partly open. He took the money which Athos offered to him, and, after turning and turning it over and over in his hands, suddenly cried out that it was bad, and that he would have him and his companions arrested as coiners.

"You scoundrel!" cried Athos, stepping towards him, "I'll cut your ears off!"

But the host stooped, took two pistols from the half-open drawer, pointed them at Athos, and called out for help.

At the same instant, four men, armed to the teeth, entered by lateral doors, and rushed upon Athos.

"I am taken!" shouted Athos, with all the power of his lungs; "Go on, d'Artagnan! spur, spur!" and he fired two pistols.

D'Artagnan and Planchet did not require twice bidding; they unfastened the two horses that were waiting at the door, leaped upon them, buried their spurs in their sides, and set off at full gallop.

"Do you know what has become of Athos?" asked d'Artagnan of Planchet, as they galloped on.

"Ah, master," said Planchet, "I saw one fall at each of his shots, and he appeared to me, through the glass door, to be fighting with his sword with the others."

"Brave Athos!" murmured d'Artagnan; "and to think that we are compelled to leave him, whilst the same fate awaits us, perhaps, two paces hence! Forward, Planchet, forward! you are a brave fellow!"

"Did not I tell you, monsieur," replied Planchet, "that we Picards are found out by being used? Besides, I am in my own country here, and that puts me on my mettle!"

And both, with free use of the spur, arrived at St. Omer without drawing bit. At St. Omer they breathed their horses with their bridles passed under their arms, for fear of accident, and ate a morsel in their hands, standing in the road, after which they departed again.

At a hundred paces from the gates of Calais, d'Artagnan's horse sank under him, and could not by any means be got up again, the blood flowing from both his eyes and his nose. There still remained Planchet's horse, but, after he stopped, he remained quite still, and could not be urged to move a step.

Fortunately, as we have said, they were within a hundred paces of the city; they left their two nags upon the high road, and ran towards the port. Planchet called his master's attention to a gentleman who had just arrived with his lackey, and preceded them by about fifty paces.

They made all speed to come up to this gentleman, who appeared to be in great haste. His boots were covered with dust, and he inquired if he could not instantly cross over to England.

"Nothing would be more easy," said the captain of a vessel ready to set sail; "but this morning an order arrived that no one should be allowed to cross without express permission from the Cardinal."

"I have that permission," said the gentleman, drawing a paper from his pocket; "here it is."

"Have it examined by the governor of the port," said the Captain, "and give me the preference."

"Where shall I find the governor?"

"At his country-house, at a quarter of a league. Look, you may see it from here—at the foot of that little hill, that slated roof."

"Very well," said the gentleman.

And, with his lackey, he took the road to the governor's country-house.

D'Artagnan and Planchet followed the gentleman at a distance, not to be noticed; but when he was out of the city, d'Artagnan quickly came up with him, just as he was entering a little wood.

"Monsieur," said d'Artagnan, "you appear to be in great haste, but as I am in great haste likewise, I wished to beg you to render me the service to let me go first."

"That's impossible," said the gentleman; "I have travelled sixty leagues in forty-four hours, and by to-morrow, at midday, I must be in London."

"I have performed the same distance in forty hours, and by to-morrow, at ten o'clock in the morning, I must be in London."

"Very sorry, monsieur; but I was here first, and will not go second."

"I am sorry too, monsieur; but I arrived second, and will go first."

"The King's service," said the gentleman.

"My own service!" said d'Artagnan.

"But this is an empty quarrel you are fastening upon me, as I think."

"No, I have full reason. I want that order of which you are the bearer, seeing that I have not one of my own, and must have one."

"You are joking, I presume."

"I seldom joke."

"Let me pass!"

"You shall not."

"My bold young man, I will blow out your brains. Here, Lubin! my pistols!"

"Planchet," called out d'Artagnan, "take care of the lackey; I will manage the master."

Planchet, emboldened by the first exploit, sprang upon Lubin, and being strong and vigorous, he soon got him on the broad of his back, and placed his knee upon his breast.

"Go on with your affair, master," cried Planchet; "I have finished mine."

Seeing this, the gentleman drew his sword, and sprang upon d'Artagnan; but he had more than he expected to deal with.

In three seconds, d'Artagnan had wounded him three times, exclaiming at each thrust:

"One for Athos! one for Porthos! and one for Aramis!"

At the third hit the gentleman fell heavily to the ground.

D'Artagnan believed him to be dead, or at least insensible, and went towards him for the purpose of taking the order; but at the moment he stretched out his hand to search for it, the wounded man, who had not dropped his sword, plunged the point into his breast, crying:

"And one for you!"

"And one for me! the best for the last!" cried d'Artagnan, in a rage, nailing him to the earth with a fourth thrust through his body.

This time the gentleman closed his eyes and fainted. D'Artagnan searched his pockets, and took from one of them the order for the passage. It was in the name of the Count de Wardes.

Then, casting a glance on the handsome young man, scarcely twenty-five years of age, whom he was leaving in his gore, deprived of sense, and perhaps dead, he gave a sigh to that unaccountable destiny which leads men to destroy each other for the interests of people who are strangers to them, and who often do not even know they exist.

But he was soon roused from these reflections by Lubin, who uttered loud cries, and screamed for help with all his imght. Planchet grasped him by the throat, and pressed as hard as he could.

"Master," said he, "as long as I hold him in this manner he can't cry, I'll be bound; but as soon as I leave go, he will howl again as loud as ever; I have found out that he's a Norman, and Normans are all obstinate."

In fact, tightly held as he was, Lubin endeavored still to get out a cry.

"Stay!" said d'Artagnan, and, taking out his handkerchief, he gagged him.

"Now," said Planchet, "let us bind him to a tree."

This being properly done, they drew the Count de Wardes

close to his servant; and as night was approaching, and as the wounded man and the bound man were at some little distance within the wood, it was evident they were likely to remain there till the next day.

"And now," said d'Artagnan, "to the governor's house."

"But you appear to me to be wounded," said Planchet.

"Oh, that's nothing! Let us despatch that which is most pressing first, and we will attend to my wound afterwards; besides, I don't think it seems a very dangerous one."

And they both set forward as fast as they could towards the country-house of the worthy functionary.

The Count de Wardes was announced, and d'Artagnan was introduced.

"You have an order, signed by the Cardinal?"

"Yes," replied d'Artagnan; "here it is."

"True, it is quite regular and explicit," said the governor.

"It ought to be," said d'Artagnan; "I am one of his most faithful servants."

"It appears that his Eminence is anxious to prevent some one from crossing to England?"

"Yes; one d'Artagnan, a Bearnese gentleman, who left Paris in company of three of his friends, with the intention of going to London."

And d'Artagnan gave, feature for feautre, and in every way, the most minute description of the Count de Wardes.

"Is he accompanied by any one?"

"Yes, by a lackey, named Lubin."

"We will keep a sharp lookout for them; and if we lay hands upon them, his Eminence may be assured they shall be reconducted to Paris under a good escort."

"And by doing so, governor," said d'Artagnan, "you will have deserved reward from the Cardinal."

"Tell him, I beg of you, that I am his humble servant."

"I will not fail."

And, delighted with this assurance, the governor signed the passport, and delivered it to d'Artagnan, who lost no time in useless compliments, but thanked, bowed, and departed.

When once out, he and Planchet set off as fast as they could, and by taking a turn, avoided the wood, and re-entered the town by another gate.

The vessel was quite ready to sail, and the captain waiting in the port.

"Well?" said he, perceiving d'Artagnan.

"Here is my pass, examined," said the latter.

"And that other gentleman?"

"He will not go to-day," said d'Artagnan; "but I'll pay you for us two."

"In that case we will be gone," said the captain.

"Yes, as soon as you please," replied d'Artagnan.

He leaped, with Planchet into the boat, and five minutes after they were on board. And it was time; for they had scarcely

sailed half a league, when d'Artagnan saw a flash and heard a detonation—it was the cannon which announced the closing of the port.

He had now leisure to look to his wound. Fortunately, as d'Artagnan had thought, it was not dangerous; the point of the sword had met with a rib, and glanced along the bone; still further, his shirt had stuck to the wound, and he had lost but very little blood.

D'Artagnan was worn out with fatigue. A mattress was laid upon the deck for him; he threw himself upon it, and fell fast asleep.

At break of day they were still three or four leagues from the coast of England: the breeze had been so light during the night, they had made but little way.

At ten o'clock the vessel cast anchor in the port of Dover, and at half-past ten d'Artagnan placed his foot on English soil, crying:

"Here I am at last!"

But that was not all, they had to get to London. In England the post was well served; d'Artagnan and Planchet took post-horses with a postillion who rode before them; and in a few hours were in the capital.

D'Artagnan did not know London, he was not acquainted with one word of English: but he wrote the name of Buckingham on a piece of paper, and every one to whom he showed it pointed out to him the way to the Duke's hotel.

The Duke was at Windsor hunting with the King.

D'Artagnan inquired for the confidential valet of the Duke, who having accompanied him in all his voyages, spoke French perfectly well; he told him that he came from Paris, on an affair of life and death, and that he must speak with his master instantly.

The confidence with which d'Artagnan spoke convinced Patrick, which was the name of this minister; he ordered two horses to be saddled, and himself went as guide to the young guardsman. As for Planchet, he had been lifted from his horse as stiff as a rush; the poor lad's strength was almost exhausted. D'Artagnan seemed to be made of iron.

On their arrival at the castle they inquired for the Duke, and learned that he was hawking with the King in the marshes, at some distance.

They were quickly on the spot named, and Patrick almost at the moment caught the sound of his master's voice, recalling his falcon.

"Whom must I announce to my lord?" asked Patrick.

"The young man who one evening sought a quarrel with him on the Pont Neuf, opposite the *Samaritaine*."

"Rather a singular introduction."

"You will find that it is as good as another."

Patrick galloped off, reached the Duke, and announced to him, in the terms directed, that a messenger awaited him.

Buckingham at once remembered the circumstance, and suspecting that something was going on in France, of which it was necessary he should be informed, he only took the time to inquire where the messenger was, and recognizing the uniform of the guards, he put his horse into a gallop, and rode straight up to d'Artagnan; Patrick, discreetly, keeping in the background.

"No misfortune has happened to the Queen?" cried Buckingham, the instant he came up, throwing all his fear and love into the question.

"I believe not; nevertheless, I believe she is in some great peril from which your Grace alone can extricate her."

"I!" cried Buckingham. "What is it? I should be but too happy to render her any service! Speak! speak!"

"Take this letter," said d'Artagnan.

"This letter! from whom does this letter come?"

"From her Majesty, as I think."

"From her Majesty?" said Buckingham, becoming so pale that d'Artagnan feared he would faint—and he broke the seal.

"What is this rent!" said he, showing d'Artagnan a place where it had been pierced through.

"Ah! ah?" said d'Artagnan, "I did not see that; it was the sword of the Count de Wardes that made that hole when he ran it into my breast."

"Are you wounded?" asked Buckingham, as he opened the letter.

"Oh! nothing! my lord, only a scratch," said d'Artagnan.

"Just Heavens! what have I read!" cried the Duke, "Patrick, remain here, or rather join the King, wherever he may be, and tell his Majesty that I hereby beg him to excuse me, but an affair of the greatest importance calls me to London. Come, monsieur, come!"—and both set off towards the capital at full gallop.

CHAPTER XXI.

COUNTESS WINTER.

As they rode along, the Duke endeavored to draw from d'Artagnan, not what had passed, but what d'Artagnan himself knew. Whilst he was listening to this account, which was delivered with the greatest simplicity, the Duke looked from time to time at the young man with astonishment, as if he could not comprehend how so much prudence, courage, and devotedness were allied with a countenance evidently not more than twenty years of age.

The horses went like the wind, and in an incredibly short time they were in London.

On entering the court of his hotel, Buckingham sprang from his horse and, without taking heed of the noble animal, threw the bridle on his neck, and sprang towards the vestibule. D'Artagnan did the same, with a little more concern, however, for

the fine creatures, whose merits he fully appreciated; but he had the satisfaction to see three or four grooms run from the stables, and take charge of them.

The Duke walked so fast that d'Artagnan had some trouble in keeping up with him. He passed through several apartments of an elegance of which even the greatest nobles of France had not even an idea, and arrived at length in a small chapel covered with a tapestry of Persian silk worked with gold, and brilliantly lit with a vast number of wax lights. Over a species of altar, and beneath a canopy of blue velvet, surmounted by white and red plumes, was a full-length portrait of Anna of Austria, so perfect in its resemblance, that d'Artagnan uttered a cry of surprise on beholding it: it might be believed that the Queen was about to speak.

Upon the altar, and beneath the portrait, was the casket containing the diamond studs.

The Duke approached the altar, fell on his knees as a priest might have done before the crucifix, and opened the casket.

"There," said he, drawing from the casket a large bow of blue ribbon all sparkling with diamonds; "here," said he, "are the precious studs which I have taken an oath should be buried with me. The Queen gave them to me, the Queen requires them back again; her will be done, like that of God, in all things."

Then he began to kiss, one after the other, those dear studs with which he was about to part. All at once, he uttered an exclamation in dread.

"What is the matter?" exclaimed d'Artagnan, anxiously, "what has happened to you, my lord?"

"All is lost! all is lost!" cried Buckingham, turning as pale as death; "two of the studs are wanting! there are but ten of them!"

"Can you have lost them, my lord, or do you think they have been stolen?"

"They have been stolen!" replied the Duke, "and it is the Cardinal who has dealt me this blow. See, the ribbons which held them have been cut with scissors."

"If my lord suspects they have been stolen—perhaps the person who stole them still has them."

"Let me reflect," said the Duke—"The only time I wore these studs was at a ball given by the King a week ago at Windsor. The Countess of Winter, with whom I had a quarrel, became reconciled to me at that ball. That reconciliation was nothing but the vengeance of a jealous woman. I have never seen her from that day. The woman is an agent of the Cardinal's."

"Why then, he has agents throughout the whole world!" cried d'Artagnan.

"Yes, yes," said Buckingham, gnashing his teeth with rage, "he is a terrible antagonist!—But when is this ball to take place?"

"On Monday next."

"On Monday next! Still five days before us; that's more time

than we want. Patrick!" cried the Duke, opening the door of the chapel, "Patrick!"

His confidential valet, who had that moment returned, appeared at his call.

"My jeweller and my secretary."

The valet de chambre went out with a mute promptitude that showed he was accustomed to obey implicitly and without reply.

But although the jeweller had been mentioned first, it was the secretary that first made his appearance, simply because he lived in the hotel. He found Buckingham seated at a table in his bedchamber, writing orders with his own hand.

"Master Jackson," said he, "go instantly to the lord chancellor and tell him that I desire him to execute these orders. I wish them to be promulgated immediately. Say that I am determined on war, and that this measure is my first act of hostility against France."

The secretary bowed and retired.

"We are safe on that side," said Buckingham, turning toward d'Artagnan. "If the studs are not yet gone to Paris, they will not arrive till after you."

"How so, my lord?"

"I have just placed an embargo on all vessels at present in His Majesty's ports, and without particular permission, not one can lift an anchor."

D'Artagnan looked with stupefaction at a man who thus employed the unlimited power with which he was clothed by the confidence of a King, in the prosecution of his amours. Buckingham saw by the expression of the young man's face what was passing in his mind, and he smiled.

"Yes," said he, "yes; Anna of Austria is my true Queen; upon a word from her, I would betray my country, I would betray my King. She asked me not to send the Protestants of La Rochelle the assistance I promised them; I have not done so. I broke my word, it is true; but what signifies that? I obeyed my love; and have I not been richly paid for that obedience? It was to that obedience I owe her portrait!"

D'Artagnan admired by what fragile and unknown threads the destinies of nations and the lives of men are some times suspended.

Buckingham assigned d'Artagnan a chamber adjoining his own. He wished to have the young man at hand, not that he at all mistrusted him, but for the sake of having some one to whom he could constantly talk about the Queen.

In one hour after, the ordinance was published in London that no vessel bound for France should leave the ports—not even the packet-boat with letters. In the eyes of everybody this was a declaration of war between the two kingdoms.

On the day after the morrow, by eleven o'clock, the two diamond studs were finished, and they were so completely imitated, so perfectly alike, that Buckingham could not tell the new ones

from the old ones, and the most practised in such matters would have been deceived as he was.

He immediately called d'Artagnan.

"Here," said he to him, "are the diamond studs that you came to fetch, and be my witness that I have done all that human power could do."

"Be satisfied, my lord; I will tell all that I have seen. But does your Grace mean to give me the studs without the casket."

"The casket would only encumber you. Besides, the casket is the more precious from being all that is left to me. You will say that I keep it."

"I will perform your commission, word for word, my lord."

"And now," resumed Buckingham, looking earnestly at the young man, "how shall I ever acquit myself of the debt I owe you?"

D'Artagnan colored up to the eyes. He saw that the Duke was searching for a means of making him accept something, and the idea that the blood of himself and his friends was about to be paid for with English gold was strangely repugnant to him.

"Let us understand each other, my lord," replied d'Artagnan, "and let us make things clear, in order that there may be no mistake. I am in the service of the King and Queen of France, and form part of the company of M. Desessarts, who, as well as his brother-in-law, M. de Treville, is particularly attached to their Majesties. What I have done, then, has been for the Queen, and not at all for your Grace. At this moment, when there is question of war, I confess to you that I see nothing in your Grace but an Englishman, and consequently, an enemy, whom I should have much greater pleasure in meeting on the field of battle than in the park at Windsor or the halls of the Louvre; all which, however, will not prevent me from executing, to the very point, my commission, or from laying down my life, if there be need of it, to accomplish it; but I repeat it to your Grace, without your having personally on that account more to thank me for in this second interview, than for that which I did for you in the first."

"We say, 'proud as a Scotchman,'" murmured the Duke of Buckingham.

"And we say 'proud as a Gascon,'" replied d'Artagnan; "the Gascons are the Scots of France."

"Go to the port, ask for the brig *Scud*, and give this letter to the captain; he will carry you to a little port, where certainly you are not expected, and which is ordinarily only frequented by fishermen."

"What is the name of that port?"

"Saint-Valery; but listen: when you have arrived there, you will go to a mean tavern, without a name and without a sign, a mere fisherman's hut. You cannot be mistaken, there is but one."

"And then?"

"You will ask for the host, and will repeat to him the word

—*Forward!* that is the password. He will give you a ready-saddled horse, and will point out to you the road you are to take. You will find, in this manner, four relays on your route. If you will give, at each of these relays, your address in Paris, the four horses will follow you thither. You already know two of them, and you appeared to appreciate them like a judge. They were those we rode on, and you may rely upon me for the others not being inferior to them. These horses are equipped for the field. However proud you may be, you will not refuse to accept one of them, and to request your three companions to accept the others; that is in order to make war against us, besides. The end excuses the means, as you Frenchmen say, does it not?"

"Yes, my lord, I accept them," said d'Artagnan, "and, if it please God, we will make good use of your presents."

D'Artagnan bowed to the Duke, and made his way as quickly as possible to the port. Opposite the Tower he found the vessel that had been named to him, delivered his letters to the captain, who, after having it examined by the governor of the port, made immediate preparations to sail.

Fifty vessels were waiting to set out, in momentary expectation of the removal of the prohibition. When passing alongside of one of them, d'Artagnan fancied he perceived on board of it the lady of Meung, the same whom the unknown gentleman had styled My-Lady, and whom d'Artagnan had thought so handsome; but thanks to the tide of the river and a fair wind, his vessel passed so quickly that he had little more than a glimpse of her.

The next day, about nine o'clock in the morning, he landed at Saint-Valery. When he galloped into the yard of M. de Treville's hotel, he had performed nearly sixty leagues in little more than twelve hours.

M. de Treville received him as if he had seen him that morning; only, on pressing his hand a little more warmly than usual, he informed him that the company of M. Desessarts was on duty at the Louvre, and that he might repair at once to his post.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE ROYAL BALLET.

On the morrow, nothing was talked of in Paris but the ball which the city officials were to give to the King and Queen, who would dance the famous La Merlaison, the King's favorite ballet.

The whole of the last week had been occupied in preparations at the City Hall for this important evening.

At midnight, great cries and loud cheers were heard; it was the King, passing through the streets which led from the Louvre to the City Hall, all illuminated with colored lamps.

Immediately the sheriffs, clothed in their cloth robes, and pre-

ceded by six sergeants, holding each a flambeau in his hand, went to attend upon the King, whom they met on the steps, where the provost of the merchants offered him the compliment of welcome; a compliment to which his Majesty replied by an apology for coming so late, but laying the blame upon the Cardinal, who had detained him till eleven o'clock, talking of affairs of state.

Everybody observed that the King looked dull and absent-minded.

A closet had been prepared for the King and another for his brother. In each of these closets were placed masquerade habits. The same had been done with respect to the Queen and Madame la Presidente. The nobles and ladies of their Majesties' suites were to dress, two by two, in chambers prepared for the purpose.

Before entering his closet the King desired to be informed the moment the Premier arrived.

Half an hour after the entrance of the King, fresh acclamations were heard: these announced the arrival of the Queen. The sheriffs did as they had done before, and, preceded by their javelin-men, went to receive their illustrious guest.

The Queen entered the great hall, and it was remarked that, like the King, she looked dull, and moreover fatigued.

At the moment she entered the curtain of a small gallery, which to that time had been closed, was drawn, and the pale face of the Cardinal appeared, he being dressed as a Spanish cavalier. His eyes were fixed upon those of the Queen, and a smile of terrible joy passed over his lips;—the Queen did not wear her diamond studs.

The Queen remained for a short time to receive the compliments of the city gentlemen and to reply to the salutations of the ladies.

All at once the King appeared at one of the doors of the hall. The Cardinal was speaking to him in a low voice, and the King was very pale.

The King made his way through the crowd without a mask, and the ribbons of his doublet scarcely tied; he went straight to the Queen, and in an altered voice, said:

"Why, madame, have you not thought proper to wear your diamond studs, when you know it would have given me so much gratification?"

The Queen cast a glance around her, and saw the Cardinal behind, with a diabolical smile on his countenance.

"Sire," replied the Queen, with faltering voice, "because in the midst of such a crowd as this, I feared some accident might happen to them."

"And you were wrong, madame! if I made you that present it was that you might adorn yourself with them. I tell you again, you were wrong."

And the voice of the King was tremulous with anger; the company looked and listened with astonishment, comprehending nothing of what passed. "Sire," said the Queen, "I can send

for them to the Louvre, where they are, and thus your Majesty's wishes will be complied with."

"Do so, madame! do so, and that at the quickest; for within an hour the ballet will commence."

The Queen bent in token of submission, and followed the ladies who were to conduct her to her closet. On his part, the King returned to his.

A moment of trouble and confusion ensued in the assembly. Everybody had remarked that something had passed between the King and Queen, but both of them had spoken so low, that all out of respect had kept at a distance of several steps, so that nobody had heard anything. The violins began to sound with all their might, but nobody listened to them.

The King came out first from his closet; he was in a hunting costume of the most elegant description, and Monsieur and the other nobles were dressed as he was. This was the costume that became the King the best, and when thus dressed, he really appeared the first gentleman of his kingdom.

The Prime Minister drew near to the King, and placed in his hand a small casket. The King opened it, and found in it two diamonds.

"What does this mean?" demanded he of the Cardinal.

"Nothing," replied the latter; "only, if the Queen has the studs, which I very much doubt, count them, sire, and if you only find ten, ask her Majesty who can have stolen from her the two studs that are here."

The King looked at Richelieu as if to interrogate him; but he had not time to address any question to him; a cry of admiration burst from every mouth. If the King appeared to be the first gentleman of the kingdom, the Queen was, without doubt, the most beautiful woman in France.

It is true that the habit of a huntress became her admirably; she wore a beaver hat with blue feathers, a surtout of gray-pearl velvet, fastened with diamond clasps, and a petticoat of blue satin, embroidered with silver. On her left shoulder sparkled the diamond studs upon a bow of the same color as the plumes and the petticoat.

The King trembled with joy and the Cardinal with vexation; nevertheless, distant as they were from the Queen, they could not count the studs; the Queen had them; the only question was, had she ten or twelve?

At that moment the violins sounded the signal for the ballet. The King advanced towards Madame la Presidente, with whom he was to dance, and the King's brother with the Queen. They took their places, and the ballet began.

The King figured opposite the Queen, and every time that he passed by her, he devoured with his eyes those studs of which he could not ascertain the number. A cold sweat covered the brow of the Cardinal.

The ballet lasted an hour.

It ended amidst the applause of the whole assemblage, and

every one reconducted his lady to her place; but the King took advantage of the privilege he had of leaving his lady, to advance eagerly towards the Queen.

"I thank you madame," said he, "for the deference you have shown to my wishes, but I think you want two of the studs, and I bring them back to you."

At these words he held out to the Queen the two studs the Cardinal had given him.

"How, sire!" cried the young Queen, affecting surprise, "you are giving me then two more; but then I shall have fourteen!"

In fact, the King counted them, and the twelve studs were all on her shoulder.

"What does this mean, My lord Cardinal?" asked the King in a severe tone.

"This means, sire," replied the Cardinal, "that I was desirous of presenting her Majesty with these two studs, and that not daring to offer them myself, I adopted these means of inducing her to accept them."

"And I am the more grateful to your Eminence," replied Anna of Austria, with a smile that proved she was not the dupe of this ingenious piece of gallantry, "from being certain these two studs have cost you as dearly as all the others cost his Majesty."

Then, after bowing to the King and the Cardinal, the Queen resumed her way to the chamber in which she had dressed and where she was to take off her ball costume.

The attention which we have been obliged to give, during the commencement of the chapter, to the illustrious personages we have introduced in it, has diverted us for an instant from him to whom Anna of Austria owed the extraordinary triumph she had obtained over the Cardinal; and who, confounded, unknown, lost in the crowd gathered at one of the doors, looked on at this scene, comprehensible only to four persons, the King, the Queen, his Eminence, and himself.

The Queen had just regained her chamber, and d'Artagnan was about to retire, when he felt his shoulder lightly touched; he turned round, and saw a young woman who made him a sign to follow her.

The face of this young woman was covered with a black velvet mask, but, notwithstanding this precaution, which was, in fact, taken rather against others than against him, he at once recognized his usual guide, the light and intelligent Mme. Bonacieux.

On the evening before, they had scarcely seen each other for a moment at the apartment of the Swiss Germain, whither d'Artagnan had sent for her. The haste which the young woman was in, to convey to her mistress the excellent news of the happy return of her messenger, preventd the two lovers from exchanging more than a few words. D'Artagnan then followed Mme. Bonacieux, moved by a double sentiment, love and curiosity. During the whole of the way, and in proportion as the corridors became more deserted, d'Artagnan wished to stop the young woman, seize her, and gaze upon her, were it only for a

minute; but quick as a bird, she glided between his hands, and when he wished to speak to her, her finger placed upon her mouth, with a little imperative gesture full of grace, reminded him that he was under the command of a power which he must blindly obey, and which forbade him even to make the slightest complaint; at length, after winding about for a minute or two, Mme. Bonacieux opened a door of a closet, which was entirely dark, and led d'Artagnan into it. There she made a fresh sign of silence, and opening a second door concealed by a tapestry, and which, opening, spread at once a brilliant light, she disappeared.

D'Artagnan remained for a moment motionless, asking himself where he could be; but soon a ray of light which penetrated through the chamber, together with the warm and perfumed air which reached him from the same aperture, the conversation of two or three ladies, in a language at once respectful and elegant, and the word "Majesty" two or three times repeated, indicated clearly that he was in a closet attached to the Queen's chamber.

The young man awaited the event quietly in comparative darkness.

The Queen appeared to be cheerful and happy, which seemed to astonish the persons who surrounded her, and who were accustomed to see her almost always sad and full of care.

The Queen attributed this joyous feeling to the beauty of the fête, to the pleasure she had experienced in the ballet, and as it is not permissible to contradict a queen, whether she smile or whether she weep, all rivalled each other in expatiating upon the gallantry of messieurs the *echevins* of the good city of Paris.

Although d'Artagnan did not at all know the Queen, he soon distinguished her voice from the others, at first by a slightly foreign accent, and next by that tone of domination naturally impressed upon all sovereign expressions. He heard her approach, and withdraw from the partially open door, and twice or three times he even saw the shadow of a person intercept the light.

At length a hand and an arm, surpassingly beautiful in their form and whiteness, glided through the tapestry. D'Artagnan, at once, comprehended that this was his recompense: he cast himself on his knees, seized the hand, and touched it respectfully with his lips; then the hand was withdrawn, leaving in his an object which he perceived to be a ring; the door immediately closed, and d'Artagnan found himself again in complete darkness.

D'Artagnan placed the ring on his finger, and again waited, it was evident that all was not yet over. After the reward of his devotion that of his love was to come. Besides, although the ballet was danced, the evening's pleasures had scarcely begun: supper was to be served at three, and the clock of St. Jean had struck three quarters past two.

The sound of voices diminished by degrees in the adjoining

chamber; the company was then heard departing; then the door of the closet in which d'Artagnan was, was opened, and Mme. Bonacieux entered quickly.

"You at last?" cried d'Artagnan.

"Silence!" said the young woman, placing her hand upon his lips; "Silence! and begone the same way you came!"

"But where and when shall I see you again?" cried d'Artagnan.

"A note which you will find at home will tell you. Begone! begone!"

And at these words she opened the door of the corridor, and pushed d'Artagnan out of the closet. D'Artagnan obeyed like a child, without the least resistance or objection, which proved that he was really in love.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE APPOINTMENT.

D'Artagnan ran home immediately, and although it was three o'clock in the morning, and he had some of the worst reputed quarters to pass through, he met with no misadventure.

Every one knows that drunkards and lovers have a protecting deity.

He found the door of his passage open, sprang up the stairs, and knocked softly, in a manner agreed upon between him and his lackey. Planchet, whom he had sent home two hours before from the Hotel de Ville, desiring him to be careful and sit up for him, opened the door to him.

That faithful valet had not tarried long in London, but working his passage on a smuggling craft, he had the good luck to come up to town with a party of recruits for the rank and file of Desessart's guards, bringing fresh mounts.

"Has any one brought a letter for me?" asked d'Artagnan, eagerly.

"No one has *brought* a letter, master," replied Planchet; "but there is one come of itself. I found a letter upon the green table-cover in your bed-chamber."

"And where is that letter?"

"I left it where I found it, monsieur. It is not natural for letters to enter in this manner into people's houses. If the window had been open, even in the smallest way, I should think nothing of it; but, no; all was as close as possible. Beware monsieur, there is certainly some magic in it."

Whilst Planchet was saying this, the young man had darted into his chamber, and seized and opened the letter; it was from Madame Bonacieux, and was conceived in these terms:

"There are many thanks to be offered to you, and to be transmitted to you. Be this evening, about ten o'clock, at St. Cloud,

in front of the pavilion built at the corner of M. d'Estrees's place. —C. B."

Whilst reading this letter, d'Artagnan felt his heart dilated and compressed by that delicious spasm which tortures and caresses the hearts of lovers.

It was the first love-letter he had received, the first meeting that had ever been granted him. His heart, swelled by the intoxication of joy, felt ready to dissolve away at the very gate of that terrestrial paradise called Love!

"My dear Planchet, I am the happiest of men!"

"And I may profit by master's happiness, and may go to bed?"

"Yes, go."

"May the blessings of heaven fall upon master; but it is not the less true that that letter——"

And Planchet retired, shaking his head with an air of doubt, which the liberality of d'Artagnan had not entirely removed.

Left alone, d'Artagnan read and re-read his billet, then he kissed and re-kissed twenty times the lines traced by the hand of his beautiful mistress. At length he went to bed, fell asleep, and had golden dreams.

At seven o'clock in the morning, he arose and called Planchet, who at the second summons opened the door, his countenance not yet quite free from the anxiety of the preceding night.

"Planchet," said d'Artagnan, "I am going out for all day, perhaps; you are, therefore, your own master till seven o'clock in the evening; but at seven o'clock you must hold yourself in readiness with two horses."

"At the appointed hour I shall be ready; only I believed that master had but one horse in the guards' stables."

"Perhaps there is but one at this moment; but by this evening there will be four."

"It appears that our journey was a remounting journey, then?"

"Exactly so," said d'Artagnan; and nodding to Planchet, he went out.

M. Bonacieux was standing at his door. D'Artagnan's intention was to go out without speaking to the worthy mercer; but the latter made so polite and friendly a salutation, that his tenant felt obliged not only to stop, but to enter into conversation with him.

Besides, how is it possible to avoid a little condescension towards a husband, whose pretty wife had appointed a meeting with you that same evening at St. Cloud? D'Artagnan approached him with the most amiable air he could assume.

The conversation naturally fell upon the incarceration of the poor man. M. Bonacieux, who was ignorant that d'Artagnan had overheard his conversation with the unknown of Meung, related to his young tenant the persecutions of that monster, M. de Laffemas, whom he never ceased to qualify, during his account, with the title of the Cardinal's executioner, and expatiated at great length upon the Bastile, the bolts, the wickets, the

dungeons, the loop-holes, the gratings, and the instruments of torture.

D'Artagnan listened to him with exemplary complaisance, and when he had finished, said:

"And Mme. Bonacieux; do you know who carried her off? for I do not forget that I owe to that unpleasant circumstance the good fortune of having made your acquaintance."

"Ah!" said Bonacieux, "they took good care not to tell me that, and my wife, on her part, has sworn to me by all that's sacred, that she does not know. But you," continued Bonacieux, in a tone of perfect bonhomie, "what has become of you for several days past? I have not seen either you or any of your friends, and I don't think you could pick up all that dust on the pavement of Paris that I saw Planchet brush off your boots yesterday."

"You are right, my dear M. Bonacieux, my friends and I have been on a little journey."

"Far from Paris?"

"Oh lord, no! about forty leagues only. We went to take M. Athos to the waters of Forges, where my friends have remained."

"And you have returned, have you not?" replied Bonacieux, giving to his countenance the most jocular air. "A handsome young fellow like you does not obtain long leaves of absence from his mistress; and we were impatiently waited for at Paris, were we not?"

"Faith!" said the young man, laughing, "I am fain to confess it, and so much the more readily, my dear Bonacieux, as I see there is no concealing anything from you. Yes, I was expected, and impatiently, I assure you."

A slight shade passed over the brow of Bonacieux, but so slight that d'Artagnan did not perceive it.

"And we are going to be recompensed for our diligence?" said Bonacieux, with a trifling alteration in his voice—so trifling, indeed, that d'Artagnan did not perceive it any more than he had the shade which, an instant before, had darkened the countenance of the worthy man.

"Ah, I hope you are a true prophet!" said d'Artagnan, laughing.

"No; that which I say is only that I may know whether you will be late."

"Why do you ask me that question, my dear host? Do you intend to sit up for me?"

"No; only since my arrest and the robbery that was committed in my house, I am alarmed every time I hear a door opened, particularly in the night. What the deuce can you expect? I told you I was no man of the sword."

"Well, don't be alarmed if I come home at one, two, or three o'clock in the morning; indeed, do not be alarmed if I do not come home at all."

This time Bonacieux became so pale that d'Artagnan could

not do otherwise than perceive it, and asked him what was the matter?

"Nothing," replied Bonacieux, "nothing; only since my misfortunes I have been subject to faintnesses, which seize me all at once, and I have just felt a cold shiver. Pay no attention to it; you have nothing to occupy yourself with but being happy."

"Then I have full occupation, for I am so."

"Not yet—wait a little; this evening, you said."

"Well, this evening will come, thank God! And perhaps you look for it with as much impatience as I do; perhaps this evening Mme. Bonacieux will visit the conjugal domicile."

"Mme. Bonacieux is not at liberty this evening," replied the husband seriously; "she is detained at the Louvre this evening by her duties."

"So much the worse for you, my dear host, so much the worse for you! When I am happy, I wish all the world to be so; but it appears that is not possible."

And the young man departed, laughing at the joke, which he thought he alone could comprehend.

"Ah, have your laugh out!" replied Bonacieux, in a sepulchral tone.

But d'Artagnan was too far off to hear him, and if he had heard him, in the disposition of mind he then enjoyed, he, certainly, would not have remarked it.

He took his way towards Treville's; his visit of the day before had been very short and very little explicative.

He found Treville in the joy of his heart. He had thought the King and Queen charming at the ball. It is true the Cardinal had been particularly ill-tempered; he had retired at one o'clock under the pretence of being indisposed. As to their Majesties, they did not return to the Louvre till six o'clock.

"Now," said Treville, lowering his voice, and looking round to every corner of the apartment to see if they were alone, "now let us talk about you, my young friend; for it is evident that your fortunate return has something to do with the joy of the King, the triumph of the Queen, and the humiliation of the Cardinal. You must take care of yourself."

"What have I to fear," replied d'Artagnan, "as long as I shall have the good fortune to enjoy the favor of their Majesties?"

"Everything, believe me. The Cardinal is not the man to forget a mystification until he has settled his accounts with the mystifier; and the mystifier appears to me to have the air of being a certain young Gascon of my acquaintance."

"Do you believe that the Cardinal knows as much as you do and knows that I have been to London?"

"The devil! you said London! Was it from London you brought that beautiful diamond that glitters on your finger? Beware, my dear d'Artagnan! a present from an enemy is not a good thing. Are there not some Latin verses upon that subject? Stop!"

"Yes, doubtless," replied d'Artagnan, who had never been able

to cram the first rudiments even of that language into his head, and who had by his ignorance driven his master to despair—"yes, doubtless there is one."

"There certainly is one," said M. de Treville, who had a tincture of letters, "and M. Benserade was quoting it to me the other day. Stop a minute—ah, this is it: 'Timeo Danaos et dona ferentes,' which means, 'Beware of the enemy who makes you presents.'"

"This diamond does not come from an enemy, monsieur," replied d'Artagnan; "it comes from the Queen."

"From the Queen! oh, oh!" said M. de Treville. "Why, it is indeed, a true royal jewel, which is worth a thousand pistoles if it is worth a denier. By whom did the Queen send you this jewel?"

"She gave it to me herself."

"Where?"

"In the closet adjoining the chamber in which she changed her toilet."

"How?"

"Giving me her hand to kiss."

"What! you have kissed the Queen's hand?" said M. de Treville, looking earnestly at d'Artagnan.

"Her Majesty did me the honor to grant me that favor."

"And that in the presence of witnesses! Imprudent woman! thrice imprudent!"

"No; be satisfied, nobody saw her," replied d'Artagnan, and he related to M. de Treville how the affair had passed.

"Oh, women, women!" cried the old soldier. "I know them by their romantic imaginations; everything that savors of mystery charms them. So you have seen the arm, that was all; you would meet the Queen and you would not know her; she might meet you and she would not know who you were?"

"No; but thanks to this diamond," replied the young man.

"Listen to me," said Treville; "shall I give you a good piece of advice—a piece of friendly advice?"

"You will do me honor," said d'Artagnan.

"Well, then, go to the nearest goldsmith's, and sell that diamond for the highest price you can get from him; however much of a Jew he may be, he will give you at least eight hundred pistoles. Pistoles have no name, young man, and that ring has a terrible one, which may betray him who wears it."

"Sell this ring—a ring which comes from my sovereign! Never!" said d'Artagnan.

"Then at least turn the stone of it inside, you silly fellow; for everybody must be aware that a younger son from Gascony does not find such gems in his mother's jewel case."

"You think, then, I have something to dread?" asked d'Artagnan.

"I mean to say, young man, that he who sleeps over a mine, the match of which is already lighted, may consider himself in safety in comparison with you."

"The devil!" said d'Artagnan, whom the positive tone of M. de Treville began to make a little uneasy—"the devil! what must I do?"

"Be particularly, and at all times, on your guard. The Cardinal has a tenacious memory and a long arm; you may depend upon it, he will repay you by some ill turn."

"But what sort of one?"

"Eh! how can I tell? Has he not all the devil's tricks at command? The least that can be expected is that you will be arrested."

"What! will they dare to arrest a man in his Majesty's service?"

"They did not scruple much in the case of Athos. At all events, young man, depend upon one who has been thirty years at court. Do not lull yourself in security, or you will be lost; but, on the contrary—and it is I who tell you so—see enemies in all directions. If any one seeks a quarrel with you, shun it, were it with a child of ten years old; if you are attacked by day or by night, fight, but retreat, without shame; if you cross a bridge, feel every plank of it with your foot, lest one should give way beneath you; if you pass before a house which is being built, look up, for fear a stone should fall upon your head; if you stay out late, be always followed by your lackey, and let your lackey be armed, if, by-the-by, you can be sure of your lackey. Mistrust everybody, your friend, your brother, your mistress—your mistress in particular."

D'Artagnan blushed.

"Of my mistress," repeated he, mechanically; "and why rather her than any other?"

"Because a mistress is one of the Cardinal's favorite means—he has not one is more expeditious; a woman will sell you for ten pistoles, witness Delilah. You are acquainted with the Scriptures, eh?"

D'Artagnan thought of the appointment Mme. Bonacieux had made with him for that evening; but we are bound to say, to the credit of our hero, that the bad opinion entertained by M. de Treville of women in general did not inspire him with the least suspicion of his pretty hostess.

"But," resumed M. de Treville, "what has become of your three companions?"

"I left them on my road: Porthos at Chantilly, with a duel on his hands; Aramis at Crevecœur, with a ball in his shoulder; and Athos at Amiens, detained by an accusation of coining!"

"See there, now!" said M. de Treville; "and how the devil did you escape?"

"By a miracle, monsieur, I must acknowledge, with a sword-thrust in my breast, and by nailing the Count de Wardes, on the bye-road to Calais, like a butterfly on a tapestry."

"There again! De Wardes, one of the Cardinal's own, a cousin of Rochefort's. But stop, my friend, I have an idea. Whilst his Eminence was seeking for me in Paris, I would take, with-

out sound of drum or trumpet, the road to Picardy, and would go and make some inquiries concerning my three companions. What the devil! they merit richly that piece of attention on your part."

"The advice is good, monsieur, and to-morrow I will set out."

"To-morrow! and why not this evening?"

"This evening, monsieur, I am detained in Paris by an indispensable business."

"Ah, young man, young man! some love-passage or other! Take care, I repeat to you, take care! it is a woman who was the ruin of us all, is the ruin of us all, and will be the ruin of us all, as long as the world stands. But promise me, if you should not happen to be killed to-night, that you will go to-morrow."

"I promise you, monsieur."

"Do you want money?"

"I have still fifty pistoles. That, I think, is as much as I shall want."

"But your companions?"

"I don't think they can be in need of any. We left Paris with each seventy-five pistoles in his pocket."

"Well, a pleasant journey to you, then."

"Thank you, captain."

And d'Artagnan left M. de Treville penetrated more than ever by his paternal solicitude for his Musketeers.

He called successively at the abodes of Athos, Porthos, and Aramis. Neither of them had returned.

As he passed the Guards Barracks, he took a glance into the stables. Three out of the four horses were already arrived. Planchet, all astonishment, was busy grooming them, and had already finished two.

"Ah, master," said Planchet, on perceiving d'Artagnan, "how glad I am to see you."

"Why so, Planchet?" asked the young man.

"Because, while you were talking with our landlord, I watched without listening to you; and, his countenance changed so, two or three times! As soon, too, as master disappeared round the corner, M. Bonacieux took his hat, shut the door, and set off at a quick pace in an opposite direction."

"It seems you are right, Planchet; all this appears to be a little mysterious; and be assured that we will not pay him any rent until the matter shall be categorically explained to us."

"Master jokes, but master will see."

"What would you have, Planchet?—It is written, that what must be must! at nine o'clock, then, be ready here, at the hotel; I will come and take you."

Planchet seeing there was no longer any hope of making his master renounce his project, heaved a profound sigh, and set to work to groom the third horse.

As to d'Artagnan, being at the bottom a prudent youth, instead of returning home, he went and dined with a Gascon priest,

who, at the time of the distress of the four friends, had given them a breakfast of chocolate.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE SUMMERHOUSE.

At nine o'clock d'Artagnan was at the Guards Barracks; he found Planchet under arms. The fourth horse had arrived.

Planchet was armed with his musketoon and a pistol. D'Artagnan had his sword, and placed two pistols in his belt; then both mounted, and departed quietly. It was quite dark, and no one saw them go out. Planchet took his place behind his master, and kept at a distance of about ten paces from him.

D'Artagnan crossed the quays, went out by the gate of La Conference, and proceeded along the road, much more beautiful then than it is now, which leads to St. Cloud.

As long as he was in the city, Planchet kept at the respectful distance he had imposed upon himself; but soon as the road began to be more lonely and dark, he drew softly nearer; so that when they entered the Bois de Boulogne, he found himself riding quite naturally side by side with his master. In fact, we must not dissemble, that the oscillation of the tall trees, and the reflection of the moon in the dark underwood, gave him serious uneasiness. D'Artagnan could not help perceiving that something more than usual was passing in the mind of his lackey, and Planchet followed the movements of his master, as if he had been his shadow, and was soon trotting by his side.

"Are we going to continue this pace all night?" asked Planchet.

"No, for you, on your part, are at your journey's end."

"I, master, am arrived! but you—"

"Why, I am going a few steps farther."

"And does master intend to leave me here alone?"

"You certainly are afraid, Planchet?"

"No; but I only beg leave to observe to monsieur, that the night will be very cold, that chills bring on rheumatism, and that a lackey who has the rheumatism makes but a poor servant, particularly to a master as active as you are."

"Well, if you are cold, Planchet, you can go into one of those wine-shops that you see yonder, and be waiting for me at the door by six o'clock in the morning."

"Master, I have eaten and drunk respectfully the crown you gave me this morning; so that I have not a sou left, in case I should be cold."

"Here's half a pistole. To-morrow morning, then."

D'Artagnan sprang from his horse, threw the bridle to Planchet, and departed at a quick pace, folding his cloak around him.

"Good Lord, how cold I am!" cried Planchet, as soon as he had lost sight of his master; and in such haste was he to warm

himself, that he went straight to a house set out with all the attributes of a suburban auberge, and knocked at the door.

In the meantime d'Artagnan, who had plunged into a bye-path, continued his route, and gained St. Cloud; but instead of following the high street, he turned behind the château, reached a sort of retired lane, and found himself soon in front of the pavilion named. It was situated in a very private spot. A high wall, at the angle of which was the pavilion, ran along one side of this lane, and on the other was a little garden, connected with a poor cottage, which was protected from passengers by a hedge.

He gained the place appointed, and as no signal had been given him by which to announce his presence, he waited.

Not the least noise was to be heard, it might be imagined that he was a hundred miles from the capital. D'Artagnan leant against the hedge, after having cast a glance behind him. Beyond that hedge, that garden, and that cottage, a dark mist enveloped with its folds that immensity in which sleeps Paris, a vast void from which glittered a few luminous points, the funeral stars of that hell!

His eyes were fixed upon that little pavilion situated at the angle of the wall, of which all the windows were closed with shutters, execept one on the first story. Through this window shone a mild light which silvered the foliage of two or three linden trees, which formed a group outside the park. There could be no doubt that behind this little window, which threw forth such friendly beams, the pretty Madame Bonacieux expected him.

Wrapt in this sweet idea, d'Artagnan waited without the least impatience, his eyes fixed upon that charming little abode of which he could perceive a part of the ceiling with its gilded mouldings, attesting the elegance of the rest of the apartment.

Ten-eleven o'clock struck!

D'Artagnan began now really to fear that something had happened to Madame Bonacieux. He clapped his hands three times, the ordinary signal of lovers; but nobody replied to him—not even an echo.

He then thought, with a touch of vexation, that perhaps the young woman had fallen asleep whilst waiting for him.

He approached a tree, easy to climb. D'Artagnan was but twenty years old, and consequently had not yet forgotten his school-boy habits. In an instant he was among the branches, and his keen eyes plunged through the transparent window into the interior of the pavilion.

It was a strange thing, and one which made d'Artagnan tremble from the sole of his foot to the root of his hair, to find that this soft light, this calm lamp, enlightened a scene of fearful disorder; one of the windows was broken, the door of the chamber had been beaten in, and hung, split in two, on its hinges; a table, which had been covered with an elegant supper, was overturned; the decanters, broken in pieces, and the fruits crushed,

strewed the floor; everything in the apartment gave evidence of a violent and desperate struggle; d'Artagnan even fancied he could recognize amidst this strange disorder fragments of garments, and some bloody spots staining the cloth and the curtains.

He hastened down into the street, with frightful beating at his heart; he wished to see if he could find any other traces of violence.

The little soft light continued to shine in the calm of the night. D'Artagnan then perceived, a thing that he had not before remarked, for nothing had led him to the examination, that the ground, trampled here and hoof-marked there, presented confused traces of men and horses. Besides, the wheels of a carriage, which appeared to have come from Paris, had made a deep impression in the soft earth, which did not extend beyond the pavilion, but turned again towards Paris.

At length d'Artagnan, in following up his researches, found near the wall a woman's torn glove; which glove, wherever it had not touched the muddy ground, was of irreproachable freshness. It was one of those perfumed gloves that lovers like to snatch from a pretty hand.

As d'Artagnan pursued his investigations everything conspired to prove that his presentiments had not deceived him, and that a great misfortune had happened.

He again ran back to the château; he thought of that silent, obscure cottage; some one from it might have seen, no doubt, and might tell of something.

The gate of the enclosure was shut, but he leaped over the hedge, and in spite of the barking of a chained-up dog, went up to the cabin.

No one answered to his first knocking. A silence of death reigned in the cottage as in the pavilion; the cabin, however, was his last resource; he knocked again.

It soon appeared to him that he heard a slight noise within, a timid noise, which seemed itself to tremble lest it should be heard.

Then d'Artagnan ceased to knock, and prayed with an accent so full of anxiety and promises, terror and cajolery, that his voice was of a nature to reassure the most fearful. At length an old worm-eaten shutter was opened, or rather pushed ajar, but closed again as soon as the light from a miserable lamp which burned in the corner had shone upon the baldrick, sword-belt, and pistol pommels of d'Artagnan. Nevertheless, rapid as the movement had been, d'Artagnan had had time to get a glimpse of the head of an old man.

"In the name of Heaven!" cried he, "listen to me: I have been waiting for some one who is not come; I am dying with anxiety. Has anything particular happened in the neighborhood? Speak!"

The window was again opened slowly, and the same face appeared again: only it was still more pale than before.

D'Artagnan related his history simply, with the omission of names: he told how he had an appointment with a young woman

before that pavilion, and how, not seeing her come, he had climbed the linden tree, and by the light of the lamp had seen the disorder of the chamber.

The old man listened attentively, making a sign only that it all was so; and then, when d'Artagnan had ended, he shook his head with an air that announced nothing good.

The old man read so much truth and grief in the face of the young man that he made him a sign to listen, and repeated in a low voice:

"It was scarcely nine o'clock when I heard a noise in the street, and was wondering what it could be, when on coming to my door, I found that somebody was endeavoring to open it. As I am very poor, and am not afraid of being robbed, I went and opened the gate and saw three men at a few paces from it. In the shade was a carriage with two horses, and a man held three saddle horses. These horses evidently belonged to the three men, who were dressed as cavaliers.

"'Ah! my worthy gentlemen,' cried I, 'what do you want?'

"'Have you a ladder?' said the one who appeared to be the leader of the party.

"'Yes, the one with which I gather my fruit.'

"'Lend it to us, and go into your house again; there is a crown for the annoyance we have caused you. Only remember this, if you speak a word of what you may see or what you may hear (for you will look and you will listen, I am quite sure, however we may threaten you), you are lost.'

"At these words he threw me a crown, which I picked up, and he took the ladder.

"After shutting the gate behind them, I pretended to return to the house, but I immediately went out at a back door, and stealing along in the shade of the hedge, I gained yonder clump of elder, from which I could hear and see everything.

"The three men brought the carriage up quietly, and took out of it a little man, stout, short, elderly, and commonly dressed in clothes of a dark color, who ascended the ladder very carefully, looked suspiciously in at the window of the pavilion, came down as quietly as he had gone up, and whispered:

"'It is she!'

"Immediately he who had spoken to me approached the door of the pavilion, opened it with a key he had in his hand, closed the door, and disappeared, whilst at the same time the other two men ascended the ladder. The little old man remained at the coach door, the coachman took care of his horses, the lackey held the saddle horses.

"All at once great cries resounded in the pavilion, and a woman came to the window, and opened it, as if to throw herself out of it; but as soon as she perceived the other two men, she fell back and they got into the chamber.

"Then I saw no more; but I heard the noise of breaking furniture. The woman screamed and cried for help. But her cries were soon stifled; two of the men appeared, bearing the woman

in their arms, and carried her to the carriage, into which the little old man got after her. The leader closed the window, came out an instant after at the door, and satisfied himself that the woman was in the carriage: his two companions were already on horseback; he sprang into his saddle, the lackey took his place by the coachman, the carriage went off at a quick pace, escorted by the three horsemen, and all was over:—from that moment I have neither seen nor heard anything."

D'Artagnan, entirely overcome by this terrible story, remained motionless and mute, whilst all the demons of anger and jealousy were howling in his heart.

"But, my good gentleman," resumed the old man, upon whom this mute despair certainly produced a greater effect than cries and tears would have done, "do not take on so; they did not kill her from you, that's a comfort."

"Do you know anything," said d'Artagnan, "of the man who led this infernal expedition?"

"A tall, dark man, with black moustaches, dark eyes, and looked like a gentleman."

"That's the man!" cried d'Artagnan, "again he, for ever he! He is my demon, to all appearance. And the short one."

"Oh! he was not a gentleman, I'll answer for it; besides, he did not wear a sword, and the others treated him with no consideration."

"Some lackey," murmured d'Artagnan. "Poor girl! what have they done with you?"

With a heavy heart, d'Artagnan again bent his way towards the ferry. Sometimes he hoped it could not be Madame Bonacieux, and that he should find her next day at the Louvre; sometimes he feared she had had an intrigue with another, who, in a jealous fit, had surprised her and carried her off. His mind was torn by doubt, grief, and despair.

"Oh! if I had my three friends here!" cried he, "I should have, at least, some hopes of finding her; but who knows what is become of them themselves?"

It was past midnight; the next thing was to find Planchet. D'Artagnan went successively into all the cabarets in which there was a light, but could not meet with Planchet in any of them.

At the sixth cabaret, d'Artagnan stopped, asked for a bottle of wine of the best quality, and placing himself in the darkest corner of the room, determined thus to wait till daylight; but this time again his hopes were disappointed, and he was compelled, then, after having swallowed the contents of his bottle, to pass the time as well as to avoid suspicion, to fall into the easiest position in his corner, and to sleep, whether well or ill. D'Artagnan was only twenty years old, and at that age sleep has its imprescriptible rights, which it imperiously insists upon, even in the saddest hearts.

Towards six o'clock, d'Artagnan awoke with that uncomfortable feeling which generally follows a bad night. He was not

long in making his toilet; he examined himself to see if advantage had not been taken of his sleep, and having found his diamond ring on his finger, his purse in his pocket, and his pistols in his belt, he got up, paid for his wine, and went out to try if he could have any better luck in his search after his lackey than he had had the night before. The first thing he perceived through the damp gray mist was honest Planchet, who, with the two horses in hand, awaited him at the door of a little den, before which d'Artagnan had passed without even suspecting its existence.

CHAPTER XXV.

PORTHOS.

Instead of returning directly home, d'Artagnan alighted at the door of M. de Treville and ran quickly up the stairs.

M. de Treville listened to the account with a seriousness which proved that he saw something else in this adventure besides a love-affair; and when d'Artagnan had finished—

"Hum!" said he, "all this smacks of his Eminence."

"But what is to be done?" said d'Artagnan.

"Nothing, absolutely nothing, at present, but quitting Paris, as I told you, as soon as possible. I will see the Queen; I will relate to her the details of the disappearance of this poor woman, of which she is, no doubt, ignorant. These details will guide her on her part, and on your return I shall perhaps have some good news to tell you."

D'Artagnan knew that, although a Gascon, M. de Treville was not in the habit of making promises, and that when by chance he did promise, he generally more than kept his word. He bowed to him, then, full of gratitude for the past and for the future, and the worthy captain, who on his side felt a lively interest in this young man, so brave and so resolute, pressed his hand kindly whilst wishing him a pleasant journey.

Determined to put the advice in practice instantly, d'Artagnan directed his course towards the Rue des Fossoyeurs, in order to superintend the packing of his valise. On approaching the house, he perceived M. Bonacieux, in morning costume, standing at his door. All that the prudent Planchet had said to him the preceding evening recurred to the mind of d'Artagnan, who looked at him with more attention than he had done before.

It appeared to d'Artagnan that M. Bonacieux wore a mask, and likewise that that mask was very disagreeable to look upon.

In consequence of this feeling of repugnance, he was about to pass without speaking to him, but, as he had done the day before, M. Bonacieux accosted him.

"Well, young man," said he, "we appear to pass rather gay nights! Seven o'clock in the morning! But where the devil

were you gadding last night, my young master? It does not appear to be very clean in the cross-roads."

D'Artagnan glanced down at his boots, all covered with mud, but that same glance fell upon the shoes and stockings of the mercer, and it might have been said they had been dipped in the same mud-heap; both were stained with splashes of mud of the same appearance.

Then a sudden idea crossed the mind of d'Artagnan. That little stout man, short and elderly, that sort of lackey, dressed in dark clothes, treated without consideration by the men wearing swords who composed the escort, was Bonacieux himself! The husband had presided over the carrying off of his wife!

A terrible inclination immediately took possession of d'Artagnan to seize the mercer by the throat and strangle him; but, as we have said, he was, occasionally, a very prudent youth, and he restrained himself. The resolution, however, which had appeared upon his countenance, was so visible, that Bonacieux was terrified at it, and he endeavored to draw back a step or two, but being before the flap of the door, which was shut, the obstacle compelled him to keep his place.

"Ah! ah! but you are joking, my worthy man!" said d'Artagnan. "It appears to me that if my boots want a sponge, your stockings and shoes stand in equal need of a brush. May you not have been philandering a little also, Master Bonacieux? Oh! the devil! that's unpardonable in a man of your age, and who, besides, has such a pretty young wife as yours is!"

"Oh, Lord! no," said Bonacieux; "but yesterday I went to Saint Mande, to make some inquiries after a servant, as I cannot possibly do without one, and the roads were so bad that I brought back all this mud, which I have not yet had time to remove."

The place named by Bonacieux as that which had been the object of his journey was a fresh proof in support of the suspicions d'Artagnan had conceived. Bonacieux had named Mande, because Mande was in an exactly opposite direction to Saint Cloud. This probability afforded him his first consolation. If Bonacieux knew where his wife was, the mercer might, at any time, by employing extreme means, be forced to open his teeth and allow his secret to escape. The question, then, only was to change this probability into a certainty.

"I beg your pardon, my dear Monsieur Bonacieux, if I don't stand upon ceremony," said d'Artagnan, "but nothing makes one so thirsty as want of sleep; I am parched with thirst; allow me to take a glass of water in your apartment; you know that is never refused among neighbors!"

And without waiting for the permission of his host, d'Artagnan went quickly into the house, and cast a rapid glance at the bed. The bed had not been slept in. Bonacieux had not been to bed. He had only been back an hour or two, he had accompanied his wife to the place of her imprisonment, or else, at least, to the first relay,

"Many thanks to you, Master Bonacieux," said d'Artagnan, emptying his glass; "that is all I wanted of you. I will now go up into my room, I will make Planchet brush my boots, and when he has done, I will, if you like, send him to you to brush your shoes."

And he left the mercer quite astonished at his singular farewell, and asking himself if he had not been a little inconsiderate.

At the top of the stairs he found Planchet in a great fright.

"Ah!" cried Planchet, as soon as he perceived his master, "here is more trouble! I thought you would never come in!"

"What's the matter now, Planchet?"

"Captain Cavois of his Eminence's guards has called."

"Did he come to arrest me?"

"I have no doubt he did, for all his carnying manner."

"Was he so polite, then?"

"All honey, master."

"Indeed!"

"He came, he said, on the part of his Eminence, who wished you well, and to beg you to follow him to the Cardinal's Palace."

"What did you answer him?"

"That the thing was impossible, seeing that you were not at home, as he might perceive."

"Well, what did he say then?"

"That you must not fail to call upon him in the course of the day; and then he added, in a low voice, 'Tell your master that his Eminence is very well disposed towards him, and that his fortune perhaps depends upon this interview.'"

"The snare is not very skillfully set for the Cardinal's," replied the young man, smiling.

"Oh, yes, I saw the snare, and I answered you would be quite in despair on your return from Troyes, in Champagne, whither you had set out yesterday evening."

"Planchet, my friend," interrupted d'Artagnan, "you are really a jewel."

"You will understand, master, I thought there would be still time, if you wish, to see M. de Cavois, to contradict me by saying you were not yet gone; the falsehood would then lie at my door, and as I am not a gentleman, I may be allowed to lie."

"Be of good heart, Planchet, you shall preserve your reputation as a man of truth; in a quarter of an hour we will set off."

"That's just the advice I was going to give, master; and where are we going, may I ask without being too curious?"

"In the opposite direction to that which you said I was gone. Besides, are you not as anxious to learn news of Grimaud, Mousqueton, and Bazin as I am to know what has become of Athos, Porthos, and Aramis?"

"Oh, yes, master," said Planchet, "and I will go as soon as you please; indeed, I think country air will suit us much better just now than the air of Paris. So, then—"

"So, then, pack up our necessaries, Planchet, and let us be off. On my part, I will go out with my hands in my pockets, that

nothing may be suspected. You can join me at the barracks. Apropos, Planchet, I think you are right with respect to our host, and that he is decidedly a frightfully low wretch."

"Ah! you may take my word when I tell you anything, I am a physiognomist, I assure you!"

D'Artagnan went out first, as has been agreed upon; then, in order that he might have nothing to reproach himself with, he directed his steps towards the residences of his three friends: no news had been received of them; only a letter, all perfumed, and of an elegant writing in small characters, was come for Aramis. D'Artagnan took charge of it. Ten minutes afterwards, Planchet joined him at the stables. D'Artagnan, in order that there might be no time lost, had saddled his horse himself.

"That's well," said he to Planchet, when the latter added the portmanteau to the equipment; "now saddle the other three horses."

"Do you think, then, master, that we shall travel faster with two horses apiece?" said Planchet, with his cunning air.

"No, master joker," replied d'Artagnan, "but with our four horses we may bring back our three friends, if we should have the good fortune to find them living."

"Which must be a great chance," replied Planchet, "but we must not despair of divine mercy."

"Amen!" cried d'Artagnan, getting into his saddle.

Our two travellers arrived at Chantilly without any accident, and alighted at the hotel of the Great Saint Martin, the same they had stopped at on their first journey.

The host, on seeing a young man followed by a lackey with two led horses, advanced respectfully to the door. Now, as they had already travelled eleven leagues, d'Artagnan thought it time to stop, whether Porthos were or were not in the house. And then perhaps it would not be prudent to ask at once what had become of the Musketeers. It resulted from these reflections that d'Artagnan, without asking intelligence of any kind, alighted, recommended the horses to the care of his lackey, entered a small room destined to receive such as wished to be alone, and desired the host to bring him a bottle of his best wine, and as good a breakfast as possible, a desire which further corroborated the high opinion the Boniface had formed of the traveller at first sight.

D'Artagnan was therefore served with a miraculous celerity. The regiment of the guards was recruited among the first gentlemen of the kingdom, and d'Artagnan, followed by a lackey with four magnificent horses, could not fail to make a sensation. The host desired to wait upon him himself, which d'Artagnan perceiving, ordered two glasses to be brought, and commenced the following conversation:

"Faith, my good host," said d'Artagnan, filling the two glasses, "I asked for a bottle of your best wine, and if you have deceived me, you will be punished by that you have sinned in, for, seeing that I hate drinking by myself, you shall drink with

me. Take your glass, then, and let us drink. But what shall we drink to, so as to avoid wounding any susceptibility? Let us drink to the prosperity of your establishment."

"Your lordship does me much honor," said the host, "and I thank you sincerely for your kind wish."

"But don't mistake," said d'Artagnan; "there is more selfishness in my toast than perhaps you may think; for it is only in prosperous establishments that one is well received; in inns that do not flourish, everything is in confusion, and the traveller is a victim to the embarrassments of his host: now, I travel a great deal, particularly on this road, and I wish to see all hosts making a fortune."

"I was thinking," said the host, "that it was not the first time I had had the honor of seeing you."

"Bah! I have passed, perhaps, ten times through Chantilly, and out of the ten times I have stopped three or four times at your house at least. Why, I was here only ten or twelve days ago; I was conducting some friends, Musketeers, one of whom, by the bye, had a dispute with a stranger, who sought a quarrel with him for I don't know what."

"Ah! exactly so!" said the host; "I remember it perfectly. Is it not M. Porthos that your lordship means?"

"Yes; that is my companion's name. Good heavens! my dear host, I hope nothing has happened to him?"

"He has done us the honor to remain here; and we are even a little uneasy about his bill."

"Pooh! but whatever expenses he may have incurred, I am sure he is in a condition to pay them."

"Ah! you infuse balm into my mind! We have made considerable advances; and this morning only the surgeon declared that if M. Porthos did not pay him he should look to me, as it was I sent for him."

"What, is Porthos wounded, then?"

"In our situation we must not say all we know; particularly when we have been warned that our ears should answer for our tongues."

"Well! can I see Porthos?"

"Certainly. Take the stairs on your right; go up the first flight, and knock at No. 1. Only warn him that it is you."

"Warn him! why should I do that?"

"Because some mischief might happen to you."

"Of what kind, in the name of wonder?"

"M. Porthos may imagine you belong to the house, and in a fit of passion might run his sword through you, or blow out your brains."

"What have you done to him, then?"

"We asked him for money."

"The devil!—ah! I can understand that; it is a demand that Porthos takes very ill when he is not in funds; but I know he ought to be so at present."

"We thought so too, as our concern is carried on very regu-

larly, and we make our bills every week, we presented our account; but it appeared we had chosen an unlucky moment, for at the first word on the subject he sent us to all the devils; it is true he had been playing cards the day before."

"Playing the day before!—and with whom?"

"Lord! who can say, monsieur? With some gentleman who was traveling this way, to whom he proposed a game of lansquenet."

"That's it, then! and the foolish fellow has lost all he had?"

"Even to his horse, monsieur; for when the gentleman was about to set out, we perceived that his lackey was saddling M. Porthos's horse as well as his master's. When we observed this to him, he told us to mind our own business, as this horse belonged to him. We also informed M. Porthos of what was going on; but he told us we were scoundrels, to doubt a gentleman's word; and that as he had said the horse was his, there could be no doubt that it was so."

"That's Porthos all over!" murmured d'Artagnan.

"Then," continued the host, "I replied that from the moment we seemed not destined to come to a good understanding with respect to payment I hoped that he would have, at least, the kindness to grant the favor of his custom to my brother host of the Golden Eagle; but M. Porthos replied, that my hotel being the best, he should remain where he was.

"This reply was too flattering to allow me to insist on his departure. I confined myself then to begging him to give up his chamber, which is the handsomest in the hotel, and to be satisfied with a pretty little room on the third floor.

"But to this M. Porthos replied, that as he every moment expected his mistress, who was one of the greatest ladies of the Court, I might easily comprehend that the chamber he did me the honor to occupy in my house was itself very mean for the visit of such a personage.

"Nevertheless, whilst acknowledging the truth of what he said, I thought proper to insist; but without even giving himself the trouble to enter into any discussion with me, he took one of his pistols, laid it on his table, day and night, and said that at the first word that should be spoken to him about removing, either within the house or out of it, he would blow out the brains of the person who should be so imprudent as to meddle with a matter which only concerned himself. So from that time, nobody enters his chamber but his servant."

"What! Mousqueton is here, then?"

"Oh! yes; five days after your departure he came back, and in a very bad condition, too; it appears that he had met with disagreeables, likewise, on his journey. Unfortunately, he is more nimble than his master; so that for the sake of his master he sets all at defiance; and as he thinks we might refuse what he asked for, he takes all he wants without asking at all."

"Well, it's a fact," said d'Artagnan, "I always observed a

great degree of intelligence and devotedness to his master in Mousqueton."

"Very possibly; but suppose if I should happen to be brought in contact, only four times a year, with such intelligence and devotedness—why, I should be a ruined man!"

"No! for Porthos will pay you."

"Hum!" said the host, in a doubting tone, "I would say that I know his great lady."

"And how did you become acquainted with her?"

"Well, you may conceive that uneasiness makes us do many things."

"What have you done?"

"Instead of putting his letter in the post, which is never safe, I took advantage of one of my lads being going to Paris, and I ordered him to convey the letter to this duchess himself. This was fulfilling the intentions of M. Porthos, who had desired us to be so careful of this letter, was it not?"

"Nearly so."

"Well, monsieur, this great lady is the wife of a proctor of the Chatelet, named Madame Coquenard; who, although she is at least fifty, still gives herself jealous airs. It struck me as very odd that a princess should live in the Rue aux Ours."

"But how do you know all this?"

"Because she flew into a great passion on receiving the letter, saying that M. Porthos was a fickle, inconstant man, and that she was sure it was on account of some woman he had received this wound."

"What, has he been wounded then?"

"Oh! good Lord! what have I said?"

"You said that Porthos was wounded."

"Yes, but he has forbidden me so strictly to say so."

"And why so?"

"Zounds! monsieur, only because he had boasted that he would perforate the stranger with whom you left him in dispute where he pleased, whereas the stranger, on the contrary, in spite of all his rhodomontades, quickly brought him on his back. Now, as M. Porthos is a very vainglorious man, he insists that nobody shall know he has received this wound except the duchess, whom he endeavored to interest by an account of his adventure."

"It is a wound, then, that confines him to his bed?"

"Ah! and something like a wound, too, I assure you. Your friend's soul must stick pretty tight to his body."

"Were you there, then?"

"I followed them from curiosity, so that I saw the combat without the combatants seeing me."

"And what took place?"

"Oh! the affair was not long, I assure you. They placed themselves in guard; the stranger made a feint and a lunge, and that so rapidly, that when M. Porthos came to the *parade* he had already three inches of steel in his breast. He immediately fell backwards. The stranger placed the point of his

sword at his throat; and M. Porthos, finding himself at the mercy of his adversary, allowed himself to be conquered. Upon which the stranger asked his name, and learning that it was Porthos, and not M. d'Artagnan, he assisted him to rise, brought him back to the hotel, mounted his horse, and disappeared."

"Very well! now I know all that I wish to know. Porthos's chamber is, you say, on the first story, No. 1?"

"Yes, monsieur, the handsomest; a chamber that I could have let ten times over."

"Well, well, be satisfied," said d'Artagnan, laughing; "Porthos will pay you with the money of the Duchess Coquenard."

"Oh! monsieur, procureuse or duchess, if she will but draw her purse-strings, it will be all the same; but she positively answered that she was tired of the exigencies and infidelities of M. Porthos, and that she would not send him a piece."

"And did you convey this answer to your guest?"

"We took good care not to do that; he would have found out how we had delivered the letter."

"So that he is still in expectation of his money?"

"Oh! yes, yesterday he wrote again, but it was his servant who this time put his letter in the post."

"Do you say the lady is old and ugly?"

"Fifty at least, monsieur, and not at all handsome, according to Pathaud's account."

"In that case, you may be quite at ease: she will soon be softened; besides, Porthos cannot owe you much."

"How, not much! Twenty good pistoles, already, without reckoning the doctor. Bless you, he denies himself nothing; it may easily be seen he has been accustomed to live pretty well."

"Never mind! if his mistress abandons him he will find friends, I will answer for it. So, my dear host, be not uneasy, and continue to take all the care of him that his situation requires."

"Monsieur has promised me not to open his mouth about the procureuse, and not to say a word of the wound?"

"That's a thing agreed upon; you have my word."

"Oh! he would kill me! I am sure he would!"

"Don't be afraid; he is not so much of a devil as he appears to be."

Saying these words, d'Artagnan went upstairs, leaving his host a little better satisfied with respect to two things in which he appeared to be very much interested—his debt and his life.

At the top of the stairs, upon the most conspicuous door of the corridor, was traced in black ink a gigantic "No. 1;" d'Artagnan knocked, and upon being desired to come in, entered the chamber.

Porthos was in bed, and was playing a game at lansquenet with Mousqueton, to keep his hand in, whilst a spit loaded with partridges was turning before the fire, and at each side of a large chimney-piece, over two chafing-dishes, were boiling two stewpans, from which exhaled a double odor, very grateful to the

olfactory nerves. In addition to this, he perceived that the top of a wardrobe and the marble of a commode were covered with empty bottles.

At the sight of his friend, Porthos uttered a loud cry of joy; and Mousqueton, rising respectfully, yielded his place to him, and went to give an eye to the two stewpans, of which he appeared to have the particular inspection.

"Ah! is that you?" said Porthos to d'Artagnan. "You are right welcome, my dear fellow!—I hope you will excuse my not coming to meet you. But," added he, looking at d'Artagnan with a certain degree of uneasiness, "do you know what has happened to me?"

"Not exactly."

"Has the host told you nothing, then?"

"I asked after you, and came up straight."

Porthos seemed to breathe more freely.

"And what has happened to you, my dear Porthos?" continued d'Artagnan.

"Why, on making a thrust at my adversary, whom I had already hit three times, and with whom I meant to finish by a fourth, I set my foot on a stone, slipped, and strained my knee."

"Indeed!"

"Honor! Luckily for the rascal, or I should have left him dead on the spot, I assure you."

"And what became of him?"

"Oh! I don't know; he had enough, and set off without waiting for the rest. But you, my dear d'Artagnan, what has happened to you?"

"So that this strain of the knee," continued d'Artagnan, "my dear Porthos, keeps you here in bed?"

"That's all; I shall be about again in a few days."

"Why did you not have yourself conveyed to Paris? Living here must be cruelly wearisome."

"That was my intention; but, my dear friend, I have one thing to confess to you."

"What's that?"

"It is that, as I found it cruelly wearisome, as you say, and as I had the seventy-five pistoles in my pocket which you had distributed to me, in order to amuse myself I invited a gentleman who was travelling this way to walk up, and proposed a cast of dice to him. He accepted my challenge, and, faith! my seventy-five pistoles quickly passed from my pocket to his, without reckoning my horse, which he won into the bargain. But you, I want to know about you, d'Artagnan?"

"What can you expect, my dear Porthos; a man is not privileged in all ways," said d'Artagnan; "you know the proverb: 'Unlucky at play, lucky in love.' You are too fortunate in your love, for play not to take its revenge; what consequence can the reverses of fortune be to you?—have you not, happy rogue

as you are, have you not your duchess, who cannot fail to come to your assistance?"

"Well! you see, my dear d'Artagnan, with what ill luck I play," replied Porthos, with the most careless air in the world; "I wrote to her to send me fifty louis, or so, of which I stood absolutely in need, on account of my accident, but she must be at her country-seat, for she has not answered me. So I yesterday addressed another letter to her, still more pressing than the first. But you are come, my dear fellow, let us speak of you. I confess I began to be very uneasy on your account."

"But your host behaves very well towards you, as it appears, friend Porthos," said d'Artagnan, directing the sick man's attention to the full stewpans and the empty bottles.

"So, so!" replied Porthos. "It is not above four days ago since the impertinent jackanapes gave me his bill, and I was forced to turn both him and his bill out of the door; so that I am here something in the fashion of a conqueror, holding my position, as it were, by conquest. So, you see, being in constant fear of being forced in that position, I am armed to the teeth."

"And yet," said d'Artagnan, laughing, "it appears to me that from time to time you must make sorties." And he again pointed to the bottles and the stewpans.

"No, not I, unfortunately!" said Porthos. "This miserable strain confines me to my bed, but Mousqueton forages, and brings in provisions. Friend Mousqueton, you see that we have a reinforcement arrived, and we must have an increase of provisions."

"Mousqueton," said d'Artagnan, "you must render me a service."

"Of what kind?"

"You must give your recipe to Planchet; I may be besieged in my turn, and I shall not be sorry for him to be able to let me enjoy the same advantages with which you gratify your master."

"Lord! there is nothing more easy," said Mousqueton, with a modest air. "It only requires to be sharp, that's all. I was brought up in the country, and my father, in his leisure time, was something of a poacher, and taught me to lay a snare and set a night-line. The consequence is that when I saw our shabby host wanted to feed us upon lumps of fat meat fit for laborers, which did not at all suit such delicate stomachs as ours, I had recourse to a little of my old trade. Whilst walking in the woods, I laid a few snares in the runs; and whilst reclining on the banks of his Highness's pieces of water, I slipped a few lines into his fish-ponds. So that now, thanks be to God! we do not want, as master can testify for partridges, rabbits, carp, or eels—all light, wholesome food, suitable for invalids."

"But the wine," said d'Artagnan, "who furnishes the wine? That, at least, must be your host?"

"He furnishes it, it is true, but he does not know that he has that honor."

"Explain yourself, Mousqueton; your conversation is full of instructive things."

"This is it, monsieur. It has so chanced that I met with a Spaniard in my peregrinations who had in his service a lackey who had accompanied him in his voyage to Mexico. This lackey was my compatriot, and we became the more intimate for there being many resemblances of character between us. We loved sporting of all kinds better than anything, so that he related to me how, in the plains of the Pampas, the natives hunt the tiger and the wild bull with simple running nooses, which they throw around the necks of those terrible animals. At first I would not believe that they could attain such a degree of skill as to throw to a distance of twenty or thirty paces the end of a cord with such nicety, but in face of the proof I was obliged to acknowledge the truth of the recital. My friend placed a bottle at the distance of thirty paces, and at each cast he caught the neck of the bottle in his running noose. I practised this exercise, and as nature has endowed me with some faculties, at this day I can throw the *lasso* with any man in the world. Well, do you understand, monsieur? Our host has a well-furnished cellar, the key of which never leaves him; only this cellar has a loop-hole. Now through this loop-hole I throw my lariat, and as I now know which part of the cellar the best wine is in, that's my point for sport. Thus you see, monsieur, what the New World has to do with the bottles which are on the commode and the clothes-press. Now, will you taste our wine, and, without prejudice, say what you think of it?"

"Thank you, my friend—thank you; unfortunately, I have just breakfasted."

"Well," said Porthos, "arrange your table, Mousqueton, and whilst we breakfast, d'Artagnan will relate to us what has happened to him during the ten days since he left us."

"Willingly," said d'Artagnan.

Whilst Porthos and Mousqueton were breakfasting with the appetites of convalescents, and with that brotherly cordiality which unites men in misfortune, d'Artagnan related how Aramis, being wounded, was obliged to stop at Crevecœur; how he had left Athos fighting at Amiens with four men who accused him of being a coiner, and how he, d'Artagnan, had been forced to run the Count de Wardes through the body in order to reach England. But there the confidence of d'Artagnan stopped; he only added, that on his return from Great Britain he had brought back four magnificent horses, one for himself, and one for each of his companions; then he informed Porthos that the one which was intended for him was already installed in the stable of the hotel.

At this moment Planchet entered to inform his master that the horses were sufficiently refreshed, and that it would be possible to sleep at Clermont.

As d'Artagnan was tolerably re-assured with regard to Porthos, and as he was anxious to obtain news of his two other friends,

he held out his hand to the wounded man, and told him he was about to resume his route in order to prosecute his researches. For the rest, as he reckoned upon returning through Chantilly, if in seven or eight days Porthos were still at the Hotel of St. Martin, he would call for him on his way.

Porthos replied that, according to all probability, his sprain would not permit him to depart yet a while. Besides, it was necessary he should stay at Chantilly, to wait for the answer from his duchess.

D'Artagnan wished that that answer might be prompt and favorable; and after having again recommended Porthos to the care of Mousqueton, and paid his expenses at the inn, he resumed his route with Planchet, who was already relieved of one of his led horses.

CHAPTER XXVI.

ARAMIS'S THESIS.

D'Artagnan had said nothing to Porthos of his wound or of his lady-love. Our Bearnais was a prudent lad, however young he might be. Consequently, he had appeared to believe all that the vainglorious Musketeer had told him, convinced that no friendship will hold out against a surprised secret, particularly when pride is deeply interested in that secret; besides, we feel always a sort of mental superiority over those with whose lives we are better acquainted than they are aware of. Now, in his projects of intrigue for the future, and determined as he was to make his three friends the instruments of his fortune, d'Artagnan was not sorry at getting in his grasp beforehand the invisible strings by which he reckoned upon moving them.

And yet, as he journeyed along, a profound sadness weighed upon his heart; he thought of that young and pretty Madame Bonacieux, who was to have paid him so richly for all his devotedness; but, let us hasten to say that this sadness possessed the young man less from the regret of the happiness he had missed, than from the fear he entertained that some serious misfortune had befallen the poor woman. For himself, he had no doubt she was a victim of the Cardinal's vengeance, and, as was well known, that vengeance was terrible. How he had found grace in the eyes of the minister, was what he himself was ignorant of, but, without doubt, what M. de Cavois would have revealed to him, if the captain of the guards had met with him at home.

Nothing makes time pass more quickly or more shortens a journey than a thought which absorbs in itself all the faculties of the organization of him who thinks. It was as a prey to this hallucination that d'Artagnan travelled, at whatever pace his

horse pleased, the six or eight leagues that separated Chantilly from Crevecœur, without his being able to remember, on his arrival in the village, any of the things he had passed or met on the road.

There only his memory returned to him; he shook his head, perceived the wine-store at which he had left Aramis, and putting his horse to the trot, he shortly pulled up at the door.

This time it was not a host, but a hostess, who received him. D'Artagnan was a physiognomist; his eye took in at a glance the plump, cheerful countenance of the mistress of the place, and he at once perceived there was no occasion for dissembling with her, or of fearing anything on the part of one blessed with such a joyous physiognomy.

"My good dame," asked d'Artagnan, "can you tell me what has become of one of my friends, whom we were obliged to leave here about twelve days ago?"

"A handsome young man, three or four and twenty years old, mild amiable, and well made?"

"Exactly the man: wounded, moreover, in the shoulder."

"Just so. Well, he is still here!"

"Ah! my dear dame," said d'Artagnan, springing from his horse, and throwing the bridle to Planchet, "you restore me to life; where is this dear Aramis? let me embrace him! I am quite anxious to see him again."

"I beg your pardon, monsieur, but I doubt whether he can see you at this moment."

"Why so? has he got a lady with him?"

"The idea! the pious lad! No, monsieur, he has not got a lady with him! It is the curate of Montdidier and the Superior of the Jesuits of Amiens."

"Good heavens!" cried d'Artagnan, "is the poor fellow worse, then?"

"Oh, no! quite the contrary; but after his illness grace touched him, and he determined to enter into orders."

"Oh! that's it!" said d'Artagnan. "I had forgotten that he was only a Musketeer for the time."

"Is monsieur still anxious to see him?"

"More so than ever."

D'Artagnan walked quickly in the direction pointed out, and found one of those exterior staircases that are still to be seen in the yards of our old-fashioned auberges. But there was no getting thus at the place of sojourn of the future abbe; the defiles of the chamber of Aramis were neither more nor less guarded than the gardens of Armida. Bazin was stationed in the corridor, and barred his passage with so much the more intrepidity that, after many years of trials, Bazin found himself near arriving at a result of which he had ever been ambitious.

In fact, the dream of poor Bazin had always been to serve a churchman, and it may be easily understood, that in the present disposition of his master, nothing could be more disagreeable to Bazin than the arrival of d'Artagnan, which might cast his

master back again into that vortex of mundane affairs that had so long carried him away. He resolved, then, to defend the door bravely; and as, betrayed by the landlady, he could not say that Aramis was absent, he endeavored to prove to the newcomer that it would be the height of indiscretion to disturb his master in his pious conference, commenced with the morning, and not, as Bazin said, to terminate before night.

But d'Artagnan took very little heed of the eloquent discourse of Master Bazin, and as he had no desire to support a polemic discussion with his friend's valet, he simply shoved him out of the way with one hand, and with the other turned the handle of the door, No. 5.

The door opened, and d'Artagnan penetrated into the chamber.

Aramis, in a black gown, his head enveloped in a round, flat cap, was seated before an oblong table covered with rolls of paper and enormous volumes in folio; at his right hand was placed the Superior of the Jesuits, and on his left the curate of Montdidier. The curtains were half drawn, and only admitted the mysterious light calculated for beatific reveries. All the mundane objects that generally strike the eye on entering the room of a young man, particularly when that young man is a Musketeer, had disappeared as if by enchantment, and, for fear, no doubt, that the sight of them might bring his master back to ideas of this world, Bazin had laid his hands upon sword, pistols, plumed hat, and embroideries and laces of all kinds and sorts.

But in their stead and place, d'Artagnan thought he perceived in an obscure corner a scourge suspended from a nail in the wall.

At the noise made by d'Artagnan in entering, Aramis lifted up his head and beheld his friend. But, to the great astonishment of the young man, the sight of him did not produce much effect upon the Musketeer, so completely was his mind detached from the things of this world.

"Good day to you, dear d'Artagnan; believe me, I am very glad to see you."

"So am I delighted to see you," said d'Artagnan, "although I was afraid I had made a mistake in the chamber, and that I had found my way into the apartment of some churchman; then another terror seized me on seeing you in company with these gentlemen—I was afraid you were dangerously ill."

The two men in black, who guessed d'Artagnan's meaning, darted at him a glance which might have been thought threatening; but d'Artagnan took no heed of it.

"I disturb you, perhaps, my dear Aramis," continued d'Artagnan, "for, by what I see, I am led to believe you are confessing to these gentlemen."

Aramis colored imperceptibly.

"You disturb me! oh! quite the contrary, dear friend, I swear; and as a proof of what I say, permit me to declare I am rejoiced to see you safe and sound."

"Ah! he'll come round!" thought d'Artagnan; "that's not bad!"

"For this gentleman, who is my friend, has just escaped from a serious danger," continued Aramis with unction, pointing to d'Artagnan with his hand, and addressing the two ecclesiastics.

"Give God praise," replied they bowing.

"I have not failed to do so, your reverences," replied the young man, returning their salutation.

"You arrive very timely, d'Artagnan," said Aramis, "and by taking part in our discussion, may assist us with your intelligence. The Principal of Amiens, the curate of Montdidier, and I are arguing upon theological questions, with which we have been much interested; I shall be delighted to have your opinion."

"The opinion of a man of the sword can have very little weight," replied d'Artagnan, who began to get uneasy at the turn things were taking, "and you had better be satisfied, believe me, with the knowledge of these gentlemen."

The two men in black bowed in their turn.

"On the contrary," replied Aramis, "your opinion will be very valuable; the question is this: the Principal thinks that my thesis ought to be dogmatic and didactic."

"Your thesis! are you then composing a thesis?"

"Without doubt," replied the Jesuit: "in the examination which precedes ordination, a thesis is always requisite."

"Ordination!" cried d'Artagnan, who could not believe what the hostess and Bazin had successively told him; and he gazed, half stupefied, upon the three persons before him.

"Now," continued Aramis, taking the same graceful position in his easy chair that he would have assumed in a boudoir, and complacently examining his hand, which was as white and plump as a woman's, holding it in the air to cause the blood to descend from it—"now, as you have heard, d'Artagnan, the Principal is desirous that my thesis should be dogmatic, whilst I, for my part, would rather it should be ideal. This is the reason why the Principal has proposed to me the following subject, which has not yet been treated upon, and in which I perceive there is matter for magnificent developments—'*Utraque manus in benedicendo clericis inferioribus necessaria est.*'"

D'Artagnan, whose erudition we are well acquainted with, evinced no more interest on hearing this quotation than he had on M. de Treville's allusion to the presents he fancied he had received from the Duke of Buckingham.

"Which means," resumed Aramis, that he might perfectly understand the matter: "'The two hands are indispensable for priests of the inferior orders, when they bestow the benediction.'"

"An admirable subject!" cried the Jesuit.

"Admirable and dogmatic!" repeated the curate, who, about as strong as d'Artagnan with respect to Latin, carefully watched the Jesuit, in order to keep step with him, and repeated his words like an echo.

Aramis cast a glance upon d'Artagnan, to see what effect all

this produced, and found his friend gaping enough to split his jaws.

"Let us speak French, worthy father," said he to the Jesuit; "M. d'Artagnan will enjoy our conversation the more."

"Yes," replied d'Artagnan; "I am fatigued with riding, and all this Latin confuses me."

"Certainly," replied the Jesuit, a little thrown out, whilst the curate great delighted, turned upon d'Artagnan a look full of gratitude.

"Listen to me, then," resumed Aramis, with politeness mingled with a little impatience. "This is the point I start from—it is a syllogism: the world is not wanting in attractions, I quit the world, then I make a sacrifice! now, the Scripture says positively, 'Make a sacrifice unto the Lord.'"

"That is true," said his antagonists.

"And then," said Aramis, pinching his ear, to make it red, as he rubbed his hands to make them white—"and then I made a rondeau upon it last year, which I showed to M. de Voiture, and that great poet paid me a thousand handsome compliments upon it."

"A rondeau!" said the Jesuit, disdainfully. "Alas, the world still speaks within you in a loud voice, *altissima voce*. You follow the world, my young friend, and I tremble lest grace prove not efficacious."

"Be satisfied, my reverend father, I can depend upon myself."

"Mundane presumption!"

"I know myself, father; my resolution is irrevocable."

"Then you persist in continuing that thesis?"

"I feel myself called upon to treat that, and no other; I will see about the continuation of it, and to-morrow I hope you will be satisfied with the corrections I shall have made in consequence of your advice."

"Work slowly," said the curate; "we leave you in an excellent tone of mind."

"Yes, the ground is all sown," said the Jesuit, "and we have not to fear that one portion of the seed may have fallen upon stone, another upon the highway, or that the birds of heaven have eaten the rest—*aves cœli comederunt illam.*"

"Plague stifle you and your Latin!" said d'Artagnan, who began to feel all his patience exhausted.

"Farewell, my son," said the curate, "till to-morrow."

"Till to-morrow, my rash young friend," said the Jesuit. "You promise to become one of the lights of the Church; Heaven grant that this light prove not a devouring fire!"

D'Artagnan, who for an hour past had been gnawing his nails with impatience, was beginning to attack the flesh.

The two men in black rose, bowed to Aramis and d'Artagnan, and advanced towards the door. Bazin, who had been standing listening to all this controversy with a pious jubilation, sprang towards them, took the curate's breviary and the missal of the Jesuit, and walked respectfully before them, to clear their way.

Aramis conducted them to the foot of the stairs, and then immediately came up again to d'Artagnan, whose senses were still in a state of confusion.

When left alone, the two friends at first observed an embarrassed silence; it however became necessary for one of them to break it first, and as d'Artagnan appeared determined to leave that honor to his companion—

"You see," said Aramis, "that I am returned to my original ideas."

"Yes; but, if you please, let us not theologize, Aramis; you must have had enough for to-day; as for me, I have almost forgotten the little Latin I have ever known. Then I confess to you that I have eaten nothing since ten o'clock this morning, and I am devilish hungry."

"We will dine directly, my friend; only you must please to remember that this is Friday: now, on such a day I cannot eat meat or see it eaten. If you can be satisfied with my dinner—it consists of cooked fruit and spinach; but, on your account, I will add some eggs, and that is a serious infraction of the rule, for eggs are meat, since they engender chickens."

"This feast is not very succulent; but never mind, I will put up with it for the sake of remaining with you."

"I am grateful to you for the sacrifice," said Aramis; "but if your body be not greatly benefited by it, your soul will, be assured."

"And so, Aramis, you are decidedly going into the Church? What will our two friends say? What will M. de Treville say? They will treat you as a deserter, I warn you."

"I do not enter the Church—I re-enter it; I deserted the Church for the world, for you know that I committed violence upon myself when I became a Musketeer."

"Who—I? I know nothing about it."

"You don't know how I quitted the seminary?"

"Not at all."

"This is my history, then. I had been at the seminary from nine years old; in three days I should have been twenty; I was about to become a priest, and all was settled.

"One evening, I had gone, according to custom, to a house which I frequented with much pleasure; when one is young, what can be expected?—man is weak. An officer who saw me, with a jealous eye, reading the 'Lives of the Saints' to the mistress of the house, entered suddenly, and without being announced. That evening I had translated an episode of Judith, and had just communicated my verses to the lady, who made me all sorts of compliments, and leaning on my shoulder, was reading them a second time. Her *pose,* which, I must admit, was rather free, wounded this gentleman's feelings. He said nothing, but when I went out he followed, and quickly came up with me.

"'Monsieur l'Abbe,' said he, 'do you like cuts with a cane?'

"'I cannot say,' answered I; 'no one has ever dared to give me any.'

"'Well, listen to me, then: if you venture again into the house in which I have met you this evening I will dare, myself.'

"I really think I must have been frightened; I became very pale, I felt my legs fail me, I sought for a reply, but could find none—I was silent.

"The officer waited for this reply, and seeing it so long coming, he burst into a laugh, turned upon his heel, and re-entered the house.

"I returned to my seminary.

"I am a gentleman born—my blood is warm, as you may have remarked, my dear d'Artagnan; the insult was terrible, and, however unknown to the rest of the world, I felt it live and fester at the bottom of my heart. I informed my superiors that I did not feel myself sufficiently prepared for ordination, and, at my request, the ceremony was postponed for a year.

"I sought out the best fencing-master in Paris; I made an agreement with him to take a lesson every day, and every day during a year I took that lesson. Then, on the anniversary of the day on which I had been insulted, I hung my cassock on a peg, assumed the costume of a cavalier, and went to a ball given by a lady friend of mine, and to which I knew my man was invited. As I expected, my officer was there. I went up to him as he was singing a love ditty and looking tenderly at a lady, and interrupted him exactly in the middle of the second couplet.

"'Monsieur,' said I, 'is it still unpleasant to you that I should frequent a certain house of La Rue Payenne? And would you still bestow a caning upon me if I took it into my head to disobey you?'

"The officer looked at me with astonishment, and then said:

"'What is your business with me, monsieur? I do not know you.'

"'I am,' said I, 'the little abbe who reads the "Lives of the Saints" and translates Judith into verse.'

"'Ah, ah! I recollect now,' said the officer, in a jeering tone; 'well, what do you want with me?'

"'I want you to spare time to take a walk with me.'

"'Come, then. Ladies,' said the officer, 'do not disturb yourselves; allow me time just to kill this gentleman, and I will return and finish the last couplet.'

"We went out. I took him to the Rue Payenne, to exactly the same spot where, a year before, at the very same hour, he had paid me the compliment I have related to you. It was a superb moonlight night. We immediately drew, and at the first pass I laid him stark dead."

"The devil!" cried d'Artagnan.

"Now," continued Aramis, "as the ladies did not see the singer come back, and as he was found in the Rue Payenne, with a great sword-wound through his body, it was supposed that I had accommodated him thus, and the matter created some scandal,

which obliged me to renounce the cassock for a time. Athos, whose acquaintance I made about that period, and Porthos, who had, in addition to my lessons, taught me some effective tricks of fence, prevailed upon me to solicit the uniform of a Musketeer. The King entertained great regard for my father, who had fallen at the siege of Arras, and the uniform was granted. You may understand that the moment is arrived for me to re-enter into the bosom of the Church."

"And why to-day, rather than yesterday, or to-morrow? What has happened to you to-day, to create all these melancholy ideas?"

"This wound, my dear d'Artagnan, has been a warning to me from heaven."

"This wound? Bah! it is nearly healed, and I am sure that it is not that which at the present moment gives you the most pain."

"What do you think it is, then?" said Aramis, blushing.

"You have one in your heart, Aramis, one deeper and more painful—a wound made by a woman."

The eye of Aramis kindled, in spite of himself.

"Ah," said he, dissembling his emotion under a feigned carelessness, "do not talk of such things. What! I think of such things, and suffer love-pains? *Vanitas vanitatum.* According to your idea, then, my brain is turned. And for whom?—for some girl with whom I have trifled in a garrison town? Fie!"

"I crave your pardon, my dear Aramis, but I thought you aimed higher."

"Higher? And who am I, to nourish such ambition?—a poor Musketeer, a beggar, unknown, who hates slavery, and finds himself low-placed in the world."

"Aramis, Aramis!" cried d'Artagnan, looking at his friend with an air of doubt.

"Dust I am, and to dust I return. Life is full of humiliations and sorrows," continued he, becoming still more melancholy; "all the ties which attach him to life break in the hand of man, particularly the golden ties. Oh, my dear d'Artagnan," resumed Aramis, giving to his voice a slight tone of bitterness, "trust me, conceal your wounds when you have any; silence is the last joy of the unhappy. Beware of giving any one the clew to your griefs; the curious suck our tears as flies suck the blood of a wounded hart."

"Alas! my dear Aramis," said d'Artagnan, in his turn heaving a profound sigh, "that is my story your are relating! A woman whom I love, whom I adore, has just been torn from me by force. I do not know where she is; I have no means of ascertaining where she has been taken to. She is perhaps a prisoner; she is perhaps dead!"

"Yes, but you have at least this consolation, that you can say to yourself she has not quitted you voluntarily; that if you learn no news of her, it is because all communication with you is interdicted: whilst I——"

"Whilst you——"

"Nothing," replied Aramis—"nothing."

"So you renounce the world, then, forever; that is a settled thing; a resolution decreed?"

"Forever! You are my friend to-day, to-morrow you will be no more to me than a shadow; or rather, even, you will no longer exist for me. As for the world, it is a sepulchre, and nothing else."

"Well, then, let us say no more about it," said d'Artagnan; "and let us burn this letter, which no doubt announces to you some fresh infidelity of your lowly maid."

"What letter?" cried Aramis, eagerly.

"A letter sent to your abode in your absence, and given to me for you."

"But from whom is that letter?"

"Oh! from some heart-broken waiting-woman, some despondent grisette; from Madame de Chevreuse's fille-de-chambre, perhaps, who was obliged to return to Tours with her mistress, and who, in order to appear smart and attractive, stole some perfumed paper, and sealed her letter with a duchess's coronet."

"What do you say?"

"Well, I really think I must have lost it," said the young man, maliciously, whilst pretending to search for it. "But fortunately the world is a sepulchre; the men, and consequently the women, are but shadows, and love is a sentiment upon which you cry Fie! fie!"

"D'Artagnan!" cried Aramis, "you are killing me!"

"Well! here it is at last!" said d'Artagnan, as he drew the letter from his pocket.

Aramis sprung towards him, seized the letter, read it, or rather devoured it, his countenance absolutely beaming with delight.

"This same waiting-maid seems to have an agreeable style," said the messenger, carelessly.

"Thanks, d'Artagnan—thanks!" cried Aramis, almost in a state of delirium. "She was forced to return to Tours; she is not faithless; she still loves me! Dear friend, let me embrace you, happiness almost stifles me!"

And the two friends began to dance around the venerable volume of St. Chrysostom, kicking about famously the sheets of the thesis, which had fallen on the floor.

At that moment Bazin entered with the spinach and the omelette.

"Be off, you scoundrel!" cried Aramis, throwing his flat cap in his face; "return to whence you came; take back those horrid vegetables and that poor kickshaw! Order a larded hare, a fat capon, a leg of mutton with garlic, and four bottles of the best old Burgundy!"

Bazin, who looked at his master, without comprehending the cause of this change, in a melancholy manner, allowed the omelette to slip into the spinach, and the spinach onto the floor.

"Now is the moment to consecrate your existence to the King of Kings," said d'Artagnan, "if you persist in offering him a civility. *Non inutile desiderium oblatione.*"

"Get to the devil with your Latin. Let us drink, my dear d'Artagnan. Hang it all! let us drink while the wine is fresh—let us drink heartily, and whilst we do so, tell me something about what is doing in the world yonder."

CHAPTER XXVII.

ATHOS.

"Well, we have now to search for Athos," said d'Artagnan to the vivacious Aramis, when he had informed him of all that had passed since their departure from the capital, and a good dinner had made one of them forget his thesis and the other his fatigue.

"Do you think, then, that any harm can have happened to him?" asked Aramis. "Athos is so cool, so brave, and handles his sword so skilfully."

"There is no doubt of all that; nobody has a higher opinion of the courage and skill of Athos than I have; but I like better to hear my sword clang against lances than against staves: I fear lest Athos should have been beaten down by a mob of serving-men: those fellows strike hard, and don't leave off in a hurry. This is my reason for wishing to set out again as soon as I possibly can."

"I will try to accompany you," said Aramis, "though I scarcely feel in a condition to mount on horseback. Yesterday I undertook to employ that cord which you see hanging against the wall, but pain prevented my continuing the pious exercise."

"That's the first time I ever heard of anybody trying to cure gun-shot wounds with a cat-o'-nine-tails; but you were ill, and illness renders the head weak; therefore, you may be excused."

"When do you mean to set out?"

"To-morrow, at daybreak: sleep as soundly as you can to-night, and to-morrow, if you are strong enough, we will take our departure together."

"Till to-morrow, then," said Aramis; "for, iron-nerved though you are, you must stand in need of repose."

The next morning, when d'Artagnan entered Aramis's chamber, he found him standing at the window.

"What are you looking at there?" asked d'Artagnan.

"I am admiring three magnificent horses which the stable lads are leading about: it would be a pleasure worthy of a prince to travel upon such horses."

"Well, my dear Aramis, you may enjoy that pleasure, for one of those three horses is yours."

"And the rich caparison, is that mine too?"

"Without doubt it is."

"What, those rich holsters, that velvet housing, that saddle studded with silver—are they all mine?"

"Yours, and nobody else's, as the horse which is pawing the ground in eagerness is mine, and the other horse which is caracoling belongs to Athos."

"They are three superb animals!"

"I am glad they please you."

"Why, it must have been the King who made you such a present?"

"To a certainty, it was not the Cardinal; but don't trouble yourself about where they come from—be satisfied that one of them is your property."

"I choose that which the red-headed boy is leading."

"Have it, then."

"That is enough to drive away all my pains; I could ride upon him with thirty balls in my body. What handsome stirrups! Hola! Bazin, come here this minute."

Bazin made his appearance at the door, dull and spiritless.

"Furbish my sword, put my hat to rights, brush my cloak, and load my pistols!" said Aramis.

Bazin sighed.

"Come, Master Bazin, make yourself easy; people gain the kingdom of Heaven in all conditions of life."

"Master was already such a good theologian," said Bazin, almost weeping; "he might have become a bishop, perhaps a cardinal."

"Well! but, my poor Bazin, reflect a little; of what use is it to be a churchman, pray? You do not avoid going to war by that means; you see the Cardinal is about to make the next campaign, helm on head and partisan in hand; and M. de Nogaret de la Valette, what do you say of him? He is a Cardinal likewise; ask his lackey how often he has had to prepare lint for him."

"Alas!" sighed Bazin, "I very well know, master, that everything is turned topsy-turvy in the world nowadays."

Whilst this dialogue was going on the two young men and the poor lackey went down into the yard.

"Hold my stirrup, Bazin," cried Aramis.

And Aramis sprung into the saddle with his usual grace and lightness; but after a few vaults and curvets of the noble animal his rider felt his pains come on so insupportably that he turned pale, and became unsteady in his seat. D'Artagnan, who, foreseeing such an event, had kept his eye on him, sprung towards him, caught him in his arms, and assisted him to his chamber.

"That's well, my dear Aramis, take care of yourself," said he; "I will go alone in search of Athos."

They took leave of each other, and in ten minutes, after commending his friend to the cares of the hostess and Bazin, d'Artagnan was trotting along in the direction of Amiens.

How was he going to find Athos, even should he find him at all? The postion in which he had left him was critical; he might, very probably, have succumbed. This idea, whilst darkening his brow, drew several sighs from him, and caused him to formulate to himself a few vows of vengeance. Of all his friends, Athos was the eldest, and the least resembling him in appearance, in his tastes and sympathies. And yet he entertained a marked preference for this gentleman. The noble and distinguished air of Athos, those flashes of greatness, which from time to time broke out from the shade in which he voluntarily kept himself, that unalterable equality of temper which made him the most pleasant companion in the world, that forced and malign gayety, that bravery which might have been termed blind if it had not been the result of the rarest coolness—such qualities attracted more than the esteem, more than the friendship of d'Artagnan; they attracted his admiration.

And yet this nature so distinguished, this creature so beautiful, this essence so fine, was seen to turn insensibly towards material life, as old men turn towards physical and moral imbecility. Athos in his hours of privation—and these hours were frequent—was extinguished as to the whole of the luminous portion of him, and his brilliant side disappeared as if in profound darkness.

Then the demi-god having vanished, he remained scarcely a man, his head hanging down—his eye dull—his speech slow and painful. It could not be said that it was wine which produced this sadness, for, in truth, he only drank to combat this sadness, which wine only, as we have said, rendered still darker. This excess of bilious humor could not be attributed to play. for, unlike Porthos, who accompanied the variations of chance with songs or oaths, Athos, when he had won, remained as impassible as when he had lost. He had been known, in the circle of the Musketeers, to win in one night three thousand pistoles; lose to the gold-embroidered belt of gala-days; re-win all this, with the addition of a hundred louis, without his beautiful eyebrow being heightened or lowered half a line, without his hands losing their pearly hue, without his conversation, which was cheerful that evening, ceasing for a moment to be calm and agreeable.

Neither was it an atmospheric influence which darkened his countenance, for the sadness generally became more intense towards the fine season of the year: June and July were the terrible months with Athos.

On account of the present; he had no care; he shrugged his shoulders when people spoke the future; his secret then was with the past, as d'Artagnan had often vaguely said.

This mysterious shade spread over his whole person rendered still more interesting the man whose eyes or mouth had never even in the most complete intoxication, revealed anything, however skilfully questions had been put to him.

"Well," thought d'Artagnan, "poor Athos is perhaps at this moment dead, and dead by my fault, for it was I who dragged him into this affair, of which he did not know the origin, of

which he will be ignorant of the result, and from which he can derive no advantage."

"Without reckoning, monsieur," added Planchet to his master's audibly expressed reflections, "that we perhaps owe our lives to him. Do you remember how he cried: 'Off, d'Artagnan! off! I am taken!' And when he had discharged his two pistols, what a terrible noise he made with his sword! One might have said that twenty men, or rather twenty mad devils, were fighting."

And these words redoubled the eagerness of d'Artagnan, who excited his horse, which stood in need of no excitement, and they proceeded at a rapid pace. About eleven o'clock in the morning they perceived Amiens, and at half-past eleven they were at the door of the cursed tavern.

D'Artagnan had often meditated against the perfidious host one of those hearty vengeances which offer consolation whilst being hoped for. He entered the inn with his hat pulled over his eyes, his left hand on the pummel of the sword, and cracking his whip with his right hand.

"Do you remember me?" said he to the host, who advanced, bowing, towards him.

"I have not that honor, my lord," replied the latter, his eyes being dazzled by the brilliant style in which d'Artagnan travelled.

"What! Do you mean to say you don't know me?"

"No, my lord."

"Well, two words will refresh your memory. What have you done with that gentleman against whom you had the audacity, about twelve days ago, to make an accusation of passing bad money?"

The host became as pale as death, d'Artagnan having assumed a threatening attitude, and Planchet having modelled himself upon his master.

"Ah! do not mention it," cried the host, in the most pitiable voice imaginable; "ah! lord, how dearly have I paid for that fault! Unhappy wretch as I am!"

"That gentleman, I say, what has become of him?"

"Deign to listen to me, my lord, and be merciful! Sit down, I beg!"

D'Artagnan, mute with anger and uneasiness, took a seat in the threatening attitude of a judge, Planchet looking fiercely over the back of his chair.

"Here is the story," resumed the trembling host, "for I now recollect you; it was you who rode off at the moment I had that unfortunate difference with the gentleman you speak of."

"I am listening to you."

"I had been warned by the authorities that a celebrated coiner of bad money would arrive at my house with several of his companions, all disguised as soldiers. I was furnished with a description of your horses, your lackeys, your countenances—nothing was omitted."

"Go on! go on!" said d'Artagnan, who quickly conceived whence such an exact description had come.

"I took, then, in conformity with the orders of the authorities, who sent me a reinforcement of six men, such measures as I thought necessary to get possession of the persons of the pretended coiners."

"Again!" said d'Artagnan, whose ears were terribly wounded by the repetition of this word *coiners*.

"Pardon me, monseigneur, for saying such things, but they form my excuse. The authorities had terrified me, and you know that innkeepers must keep on good terms with the authorities."

"But, once again, that gentleman, where is he? What is become of him? Is he dead? Is he living?"

"Patience, we are coming to it. There happened then that which you know, and of which your precipitate departure," added the host, with a cunning that did not escape d'Artagnan, "appeared to authorize the issue. That gentleman, your friend, defended himself desperately. His lackey, who, by an unforseen piece of ill-luck, had quarrelled with the people belonging to the authorities, disguised as stable-lads——"

"Miserable scoundrel!" cried d'Artagnan, "you were all in the plot then! and I really don't know what prevents me from exterminating you all!"

"Alas! you will soon see we were not so. Your friend (I ask pardon for not calling him by the honorable title which no doubt he bears, but we do not know that name), your friend having disabled two men with his pistols, retreated fighting with his sword, with which he crippled one of my men, and stunned me with a blow of the flat side of it."

"But, you infernal villain! when will you come to the end?" cried d'Artagnan; "Athos, what is become of Athos?"

"Whilst fighting and retreating, as I have told my lord, he found the door of the cellar stairs behind him, and as the door was open, he took out the key and barricaded himself inside. As we were sure of finding him there, we left him alone."

"Yes," said d'Artagnan, "you did not particularly wish to kill him, and so were satisfied with detaining him a prisoner."

"Goodness! a prisoner? Why, he imprisoned himself, I will be upon my oath he did. In the first place he had made rough work of it; one man was killed on the spot, and two others were severely wounded. The dead man, and the two that were wounded, were carried off by their companions, and I have heard nothing of either the one or the other since. As for myself, as soon as I recovered my senses, I went to the governor, to whom I related all that had passed, and whom I asked what I should do with my prisoner. But the governor was all astonishment; he told me he knew nothing about the matter, that the orders I had received did not come from him, and that if I had the audacity to mention his name as being concerned in this disturbance he would have me hanged. It appears that I made a mistake, master, that I had arrested the wrong person, and that he whom I ought to have arrested had escaped."

"But Athos!" cried d'Artagnan, whose impatience was increased by the state of abandonment in which the authorities left the matter; "Athos! where is he?"

"As I was anxious to repair the wrongs I had done the prisoner," resumed the man, "I took my way straight to the cellar, in order to set him at liberty. Ah! he was no longer a man, he was a devil! To my offer of liberty he replied that it was nothing but a snare, and that before he came out he intended to impose his own conditions. I told him, very humbly —for I could not conceal from myself the scrape I had got into by laying hands on one of his Majesty's Musketeers—I told him I was quite ready to submit to his conditions."

"'In the first place,' said he, 'I insist upon having my lackey placed with me, fully armed.' We hastened to obey this order; for you will please to understand, monsieur, we were disposed to do everything your friend could desire. M. Grimaud (he told us his name, he did, although he does not talk much), M. Grimaud then went down to the cellar, wounded as he was; then his master, having received him, barricaded the door afresh, and ordered us to remain quietly in our own bar."

"Well, but where is Athos now?" cried d'Artagnan.

"In the cellar, monsieur."

"What! you good-for-nothing scoundrel! What! have you kept him in the cellar all this time?"

"Merciful heaven! No, master! We keep in the cellar! You do not know what he is about in the cellar! Ah! if you could but persuade him to come out, I should owe you the gratitude of my whole life; I should adore you as my patron saint!"

"Then he is there? I shall find him there?"

"Without doubt you will; he persists in remaining there. We every day pass through the loop-hole some bread at the end of a fork, and some meat when he asks for it; but alas! it is not of bread and meat that he makes the greatest consumption. I once endeavored to go down with two of my servants, but he flew into a terrible rage. I heard the noise he made in loading his pistols, and his servant in loading his musketoon. Then when we asked them what were their intentions, the master replied that he had forty charges of fire, and that he and his lackey would fire to the last one, before he would allow a single soul of us to set foot in the cellar. Upon this I went and complained to the governor, who replied, that I only had what I deserved, and that it would teach me to insult honorable gentlemen who took up their residence in my house."

"So that from that time——" replied d'Artagnan, totally unable to refrain from laughing at the pitiable face of the host.

"So that from that time, master," continued the latter, "we have led the most miserable life imaginable; for you must know that all our provisions are in the cellar: our wine in bottles and in the cask; beer, oil, groceries, bacon, and large sausages; and as we are prevented from going down, we are forced to refuse food and drink to the travellers who come to the house, so that

our house is daily going to ruin. If your friend remains another week in my cellar I shall be a ruined man."

"And not more than justice, neither, you stupid man; could you not perceive by our appearance that we were people of quality, and not coiners—say?"

"Yes, master, you are right," said the host. "But, hark! hark! there he is in a passion again!"

"Somebody has disturbed him, no doubt," said d'Artagnan.

"But he must be disturbed," cried the host, "for two English gentlemen just arrived. They like good wine, as you may know, and have asked for the best. My wife then requested permission of M. Athos to go into the cellar to satisfy these gentlemen; and he, as usual, has refused. Ah! good heaven! there is the Witches' Sabbath louder than ever!"

D'Artagnan, in fact, heard a great din on the side next the cellar. He rose, and preceded by the host, wringing his hands, and followed by Planchet with his musketoon ready, he approached the scene of action.

The two gentlemen were exasperated; they had had a long ride, and were dying with hunger and thirst.

"But this is tyranny!" cried one of them, in very good French, though with a foreign accent; "this madman will not allow these good people access to their own wine! Nonsense! let us break open the door, and if he is too far gone in his madness, well, we will kill him!"

"Softly, gentlemen!" said d'Artagnan, drawing his pistols from his belt, "there is nobody to be killed, if you please!"

"Good! good!" cried Athos, from the other side of the door, "let them just come on, these devourers of little children, and we shall see!"

Brave as they appeared to be, the two English gentlemen looked at each other hesitatingly; it might be said that there was in that cellar one of those hungry ogres, the gigantic heroes of popular legends, into whose cavern nobody could force their way with impunity.

There was a moment of silence; but at length the two Englishmen felt ashamed to draw back, and the more angry one descended the five or six steps which led to the cellar, and gave a kick against the door enough to split a wall.

"Planchet," said d'Aratgnan, cocking his pistols, "I will take charge of the one at the top, you look to the one below. Now, gentlemen, if it's battle you want, you shall have it."

"Good Heaven!" cried the hollow voice of Athos, "I can hear d'Artagnan, I think."

"Yes!" cried d'Artagnan, exalting his voice, in his turn, "I am here, my friend!"

"Soho! then," replied Athos, "we will give it to these breakers-in of doors!"

The gentlemen had drawn their swords, but they found themselves taken between two fires; they still hesitated an instant;

but, as before, pride prevailed, and a second kick split the door from bottom to top.

"Stand on one side, d'Artagnan—stand on one side," cried Athos, "I am going to fire!"

"Gentlemen!" exclaimed d'Artagnan, whom reflection never abandoned, "gentlemen, think of what you are about! Patience, Athos! You are running your heads into a very silly affair; you will be riddled. My lackey and I will have three shots at you, and you will get as many from the cellar; you will then have our swords, with which, I can assure you, my friend and I can play tolerably well. Let me manage your business and my own. You shall soon have something to drink; I give you my word."

"If there is any left," grumbled the jeering voice of Athos.

The host felt cold sweat creep down his back.

"What! the devil! there must be plenty left," replied d'Artagnan: "be satisfied of that; these two can never have drunk all the cellar. Gentlemen, return your swords to their scabbards."

"We will, provided you replace your pistols in your belt."

"Willingly."

And d'Artagnan set the example. Then turning towards Planchet, he made him a sign to uncock his musketoon.

The Englishmen, overcome by these peaceful proceedings, sheathed their swords, grumblingly. The story of Athos's imprisonment was then related to them; and as they were really gentlemen, they pronounced the host in the wrong.

"Now, gentlemen," said d'Artagnan, "go up to your room again, and in ten minutes, I will answer for it, you shall have all you desire."

The Englishmen bowed, and went up stairs.

"Now I am alone, my dear Athos," said d'Artagnan, "open the door, I beg of you."

"Instantly," said Athos.

Then was heard a great noise of faggots being removed, and of the groaning of posts; these were the counterscarps and bastions of Athos, which the besieged demolished himself.

An instant after, the broken door was removed, and the pale face of Athos appeared, who with a rapid glance took a survey.

D'Artagnan threw himself on his neck and embraced him tenderly; he then endeavored to draw him from his moist abode, but, to his surprise, perceived that Athos staggered.

"Why, are you wounded?" said he.

"I! not at all; I am dead drunk, that's all, and never did a man set about getting so better. Vive dieu! my good host! I must at least have drunk for my part a hundred and fifty bottles."

"Misericorde!" cried the host, "if the lackey has drunk only half as much as the master, I am a ruined man."

"Grimaud is a well-bred lackey; he would never think of faring in the same manner as his master; he only drank from the butt: hark! I don't think he put the faucet in again. Do you hear it? It is running now."

D'Artagnan burst into a loud laugh, which changed the trembling of the host into a burning fever.

In the meantime, Grimaud appeared in his turn behind his master, with his musketoon on his shoulder, and his head shaking like one of those drunken satyrs in the pictures of Rubens. He was moistened before and behind with a liquid which the host recognized as his best olive oil.

The party crossed the public room and proceeded to take possession of the best apartment in the house, which d'Artagnan occupied by authority.

In the mean time, the host and his wife hurried down with lamps into the cellar, which had so long been interdicted to them, and where a frightful spectacle awaited them.

Beyond the fortifications through which Athos had made a breach in order to get out, and which were composed of faggots, planks, and empty casks, heaped up according to all the rules of the strategic art, they found, swimming in puddles of oil and wine, the bones and fragments of all the hams they had eaten; whilst a heap of broken bottles filled the whole left-hand corner of the cellar, and a tun, the cock of which was left running, was yielding, by this means, the last drop of its blood. "The image of devastation and death," as the ancient poet says, "reigned as over a field of battle."

Of sixty large sausages, that had been suspended from the joists, scarcely any remained.

Then the lamentations of the host and hostess pierced the vault of the cellar. D'Artagnan himself was moved by them; Athos did not even turn his head.

But to grief succeeded rage. The host armed himself with a spit, and rushed into the chamber occupied by the two friends.

"Some wine!" said Athos, on perceiving the host.

"Some wine!" cried the stupefied host—"some wine! Why you have drunk more than a hundred pistoles' worth!—I am a ruined man, lost! destroyed!"

"Bah!" said Athos; "why, we were always dry."

"If you had been contented with drinking, why, well and good; but you have broken all the bottles."

"You pushed me upon a heap which rolled down. That was your fault."

"All my oil is lost!"

"Oil is a sovereign balm for wounds, and my poor Grimaud here was obliged to dress those you had inflicted on him."

"All my sausages gnawed!"

"There is an enormous number of rats in that cellar."

"You shall pay me for all this," cried the exasperated host.

"You triple ass!" said Athos, rising; but he sank down again immediately; he had tried his strength to the utmost. D'Artagnan came to his relief, with his whip in his hand.

The host drew back and burst into tears.

"This will teach you," said d'Artagnan, "to treat the guests God sends you in a more courteous fashion."

"God! say the devil!"

"My dear friend," said d'Artagnan, "if you stun us in this manner we will all four go and shut ourselves up in your cellar, and see if the mischief be as great as you say."

"Oh! gentlemen! gentlemen!" said the host, "I have been wrong. I confess it, but, pardon to every sin! you are a gentleman and I am a poor aubergiste—you will have pity on me."

"Ah! if you speak in that way," said Athos, "you will break my heart, and the tears will flow from my eyes as the wine flowed from the cask. We are not such devils as we appear to be. Come hither, and let us talk the matter over."

The host approached with hesitation.

"Come hither, I say, and don't be afraid," continued Athos. "At the moment I was about to pay you, I had placed my purse on the table."

"Yes, monsieur."

"That purse contained sixty pistoles—where is it?"

"Deposited in the justice's office: they said it was bad money."

"Very well; get me my purse back and keep the sixty pistoles."

"But monseigneur knows very well that justice never lets go that which it once lays hold of. If it were bad money, there might be some hopes; but unfortunately they are all good pieces."

"Manage the matter as well as you can, my good man; it does not concern me, the more so as I have not a livre left."

"Come," said d'Artagnan, "let us try further; Athos's horse, where is that?"

"In the stable."

"How much is it worth?"

"Fifty pistoles at most."

"It's worth eighty; take it, and there ends the matter."

"What!" cried Athos, "are you selling my horse—my Bajazet? and pray, upon what shall I make my campaign? upon Grimaud?"

"I have brought you another," said d'Artagnan.

"Another!"

"And a magnificent one, too!" cried the host.

"Well, since there is another finer and younger, why, you may take the old one, and let us have some wine."

"Which?" asked the host, quite cheerful again.

"Some of that at the bottom, near the lathes; there are twenty-five bottles of it left—all the rest were broken by my fall. Bring up six of them."

"Why, this man is a tun!" said the host, aside; "if he only remains here a fortnight, and pays for what he drinks, my affairs will soon be right again."

"And don't forget," said d'Artagnan, "to bring up four bottles of the same sort for the two English gentlemen."

"And now," said Athos, "whilst they are bringing up the wine, tell me, d'Artagnan, what has become of the others—come!"

D'Artagnan related how he had found Porthos in bed with a strained knee, and Aramis at a table between two theologians. As he finished, the host entered with the wine and a ham, which, fortunately for him, had been left out of the cellar.

"That's well!" said Athos, filling his glass and that of his friend; "here's to Porthos and Aramis! But you, d'Artagnan, what is the matter with you, and what has happened to you, personally? You don't look happy!"

"Alas!" said d'Artagnan, "it is because I am the must unfortunate of all!"

"You! unfortunate!" said Athos; "come! how the devil can you be unfortunate? let us see that."

"Presently!" said d'Artagnan.

"Presently! and why presently? Now, that's because you think I am drunk, d'Artagnan. But, take this with you, my ideas are never so clear as when I have had plenty of wine. Speak, then, I am all ears."

D'Artagnan related his adventure with Madame Bonacieux. Athos listened to him with perfect immobility of countenance; and, when he had finished—

"Trifles, all that," said Athos, "nothing but trifles!" That was Athos's expression.

"You always say trifles, my dear Athos!" said d'Artagnan, "and that comes very ill from you, who have never been in love."

The drink-deadened eye of Athos flashed, but it was only for a moment—it became dull and vacant as before.

"That's true," said he, quietly; "for my part, I have never loved."

"Acknowledge, then, you stone-hearted man," said d'Artagnan, "that you have no right to be so hard upon us whose hearts are tender."

"Tender hearts! wounded hearts!" said Athos.

"What do you say?"

"I say that love is a lottery, in which he who wins, wins death! You are very fortunate to have lost, believe me, my dear d'Artagnan. And if I may be allowed to advise you, it will be to lose always."

"Oh! but she seemed to love me so!"

"She seemed, did she?"

"Oh! she did love me!"

"You boy! why, there lives not a man who has not believed, as you do, that his mistress loved him, and there lives not a man who has not been deceived by his mistress."

"Except you, Athos, who never had one."

"That's true," said Athos, after a moment's silence—"that's true! I never had one! I—I—Drink!"

"But then, philosopher as you are," said d'Artagnan, "it is your duty to instruct me, to support me; I stand in need of being taught and consoled."

"Consoled! for what?"

"For my misfortune."

"Your misfortune is laughable," said Athos, shrugging his shoulders; "I should like to know what you would say if I were to relate to you a real tale of love!"

"Which concerns you?"

"Either me or one of my friends, what matter?"

"Tell it, Athos—tell it."

"Drink! I shall tell it better if I drink."

"Drink and relate, then."

"Not a bad idea!" said Athos, emptying and filling his glass; "the two things go marvellously well together."

"I am all attention," said d'Artagnan.

Athos collected himself, and in proportion as he did so, d'Artagnan saw that he became paler; he was at that period of intoxication in which vulgar drinkers fall and sleep. He kept himself upright and dreamed, without sleeping. This somnambulism of drunkenness had something frightful in it.

"You particularly wish it?" asked he.

"I beg you will," said d'Artagnan.

"Be it done, then, as you desire," began Athos: but as he himself did not know the relation in all its details, and as, further, he was compelled to guard himself in speaking to the guardsman by pretending it happened to a friend of his, we prefer to gratify the reader with the narration in unstinted details.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE WIFE OF ATHOS.

In the little and low principal room of the presbytery of Vitray, an insignificant though pretty hamlet in the Province of Berry, a very witching and lovely girl, with curling fair hair, caught up in a blue ribbon, was superintending the packing of articles of dress and furniture, as if for a removal.

The bright sunshine streamed in through a lattice window, and lay on the logs in the vast fireplace, as if to extinguish the flame, according to the rustic belief. The active worker was a sturdy wench who lifted the heavy objects with a bull's strength.

"That is right," went on the fair girl, with a haughty air, as though she were born to command; "let us have all ready, so that the carter may take the lot at one journey. Did you not hear that the house must be cleared to-day?"

Though not tired, the woman left off to open the door, at which some hand had knocked.

"Nay, it be not the carter," said she, surlily; "it is nought but Master Grimaud, from the castle."

The young servant hailed as Grimaud bowed very respectfully to the girl who seemed mistress here, and holding out a letter to her, said: "If you please, Mdlle. Charlotte, it is from my master, the viscount."

Taking the letter, but not opening it, the girl said, with a kind of wakening doubt, albeit the messenger was tolerably composed, she remarked in her sweet voice, a little tremulously:

"Our lord has the habit of giving us a look in as he goes by to the chase: how is it I lose the honor of seeing him this morning?"

Grimaud looked round warily; then, perceiving that the woman was going up the stairs in a dull, heedless manner, he was emboldened to reply:

"I reckon that my young lord has not come, out of prudence."

"Prudence?" echoed Mdlle. Charlotte, dismayed.

"The fact is, yesterday the viscount had a difference, what we common folks call a break-out, with his father."

"Quarrelled with his father, the count?" repeated the girl, more and more uneasy, although she seemed to possess much self-control in spite of her youth. "He is always full of respect for the old lord. Whatever could they be at variance about?"

"Well, d'ye see, mademoiselle, the old gentleman wishes to have him pay his addresses to Mdlle. de la Lussaie——"

"The richest heiress in the county," interpolated Mdlle. Charlotte, deeply interested.

"That's it," said Grimaud, with a knowing eye; "but my young lord refused to go near the lady, under the pretext that he was not thinking of marrying yet. But, of course, it looks so odd that a man who is not going to marry should keep away from La Lussaie and yet call here daily—well, you see how it is," and he fidgeted with his cap.

"I am not sure that I do follow you, my good Grimaud," answered the girl, with a pale face and her under lip quivering, "but I am much obliged to you for the explanation. Thanks. Let me see what the viscount has kindly written me."

Grimaud politely studied the stained glass in a window frame while the girl read as follows, to herself:

MADEMOISELLE: The new priest who comes to replace your brother, whose long absence has led to the belief that he has given up the curacy of Vitray, will arrive to-day.

"Bless us! the new priest to-day," repeated Grimaud, catching the last words. "Well, it is a half a year since your brother went away, and that is a long time for pious folks to go without religious cares."

Charlotte continued to read.

But, as you have become fond of the house where you have been your brother's housekeeper, pray regard it and retain it as your own. I shall see that the new-comer is lodged in another. Meanwhile, he can dwell in the castle summer-house. So you may dwell at home, with no trouble or inconvenience. Believe me, Mademoiselle, to be yours tenderly, and the devoted servant,

VISCOUNT DE LA FERE.

Grimaud ventured to cast an inquiring glance on the young woman, but she preserved the deep abstraction into which the note had plunged her.

"Any answer to go, mademoiselle?" he questioned.

"Perhaps the day will not pass without the viscount passing," she began, hesitatingly.

"Oh, most certainly!" exclaimed Grimaud, in a tone of unshaken belief.

"So I shall await my lord, and thank him for his offer face to face."

Grimaud departed, a little crestfallen, for a servant always feels slighted when he is not wholly trusted as a go-between of lovers, of whom one is a master or mistress.

As if she had already forgotten him, though not the message, Charlotte breathed out a long sigh of relief

"It came in good time," she thought. "In a month or less I should have been at the end of my resources, if compelled to leave this house to set up in another pay rent in advance, since I am regarded as a foreigner, and bear the cost of removal. So this house is as good as given to me? A poor place, but it is the antechamber to the castle which stands yonder," she added, looking out of the window on the old manorial building, embowered in huge chestnuts, its red-tiled roof with peaked caps gleaming in the sun. "The castle! for three hundred years it has carried the rank of count with it, and a baron's rights beside. The lord and lady here have the power of life and death. Oh! it was almost cruelty to give an outlook from this humble hovel on the superb castle. There is a saying that a cat may look at a king, but whatever likeness I may have to the felines, I do not care to see what I may not enjoy."

Her reflections were interrupted by the descent of the woman from above-stairs with an enormous armful of odds and ends to be added to the collection on this floor.

"Stay, Claudette," said the girl, arousing to the changed situation; "it is useless to gather up the things, for we are not going to move."

"Not going to shift?" said the woman, dropping her burden on the floor.

"That is it. Pick those things up and tidy up the room. When you get a little order back again, clear this table, and set it with wine and those cakes I made. This viscount may be coming home from hunting this way, and he will partake of refreshment, though it will be a poor return in our best for the kindness he has done me this day."

Claudette went on with the work indicated with the sulky obedience of an animal who carries off to market the eatables on which it was never regaled. In the meantime, her young mistress stepped into the window recess, and seating herself on the black oaken settee, among half-wild flowers in rude earthen pots, looked steadfastly towards the old woods in whose shadowy vistas she seemed to seek for a desired figure. Her expectation

was not long unverified, for she soon could see a horseman under the boughs, who, while he dashed towards the priest's house, hushed his dogs and did not sound his silver horn, as should have been the course if he had wished his coming to be known at the castle.

"It is Olivier!" she murmured, but without more emotion than the window-post against which she laid her hand to rise. "Take those things upstairs again, Claudette, and stay you there until you are called."

On being left alone, she glanced at a small mirror of polished steel hanging by a ribbon beside the mantel-piece, and, satisfied with her examination of a faultless figure and fascinating face, occupied herself in arranging a glass, a jug, and some pastry on the table. While so engaged, a young cavalier had reached the horse-block at the garden entrance, flung the bridle on his horse's neck, bade his two hounds guard his hat and gloves, and with an agile step he came up the walk to the door between the natural hedge of flowers. He was a tall and slim, yet muscular, youth, with those fine hands and feet which, in that day, were accounted the appanage of the well-born solely. His hunting costume of buff leather well fitted his form, and the excitement of the headlong ride had given a flush of rich color to a face rather haughty, pale, and inclined to thoughtfulness unsuitable to his twenty years.

"The viscount," said Charlotte, turning towards the door and taking a step towards him, while he, in his eagerness to seize her white, nervous hand, took three.

"Yes; I saw you from afar in the window, Charlotte: why did you get up and stand away?"

"Only to prepare something for your reception."

"Oh, was it really only that? thank you!" and again he kissed her hand before reluctantly releasing it.

"You are very late to-day," she reproached him.

"I had need of a long ride—a hard gallop. And then, I wrote you—did not Grimaud bring you my letter?"

"Yes, he did; oh, how good you are to me—how very good, my lord!"

The young gentleman flushed red, and faltered: "Not so very good—to present you with a hovel, who ought to be housed in a palace."

The compliment did not seem extravagant to one so beautiful, and he spoke with perfect sincerity.

"Nay, I know what I say, and my thought is spoken when I call you much too good, my lord viscount. I am grateful to you for the offer, but I cannot accept it."

If he had only heard her countermand the operations for the removal, he must have been astonished at this speech in contradiction.

"You cannot accept!" he said, with a young man's timidity; "you never mean to say that you need blush to receive any gift from me?"

"Oh, if you were the master here, it would be another matter, but as it is, I am bound to quit this country, M. de la Fere —I really must depart." And she drooped her head, and through the fingers forming a screen over her cerulean eyes their glint or that of tears for an instant sparkled.

"You ought to refuse this cottage? you must quit the country?" repeated the young noble, in a dying voice, as if he could not believe the step in direct opposition to what he had tried to prevent. "I do not understand you, Charlotte—explain! Why should you depart from Berry—why from me?"

With an effort, and taking her hand from her face, the girl responded: "Because it does not become a girl, poor, obscure, with no prospects, a fugitive from her native land, to be the stumbling-block to the glory and fortune of a nobleman of your name and merit."

"What leads you to say that, Charlotte?" stammered he.

"Does not your sire wish you to marry young Mademoiselle de la Lussaie, fair and high-born, whose wealth will double your income?"

"If you know that much about the matter, you ought to know that I have refused the alliance." And he added to himself: "It's that lad Grimaud, who must be taught to keep a still tongue in his head."

"Yes, and I cannot allow it," she returned, lifting her head proudly. "By going away I spare you the grief of disobeying your father. I am an orphan, but can appreciate duty to one's parents. I also spare you self-reproach at spoiling your revenue."

The Viscount Olivier de la Fere reflected, cooled by her dispassionate tone. Mdlle. de la Lussaie was a neighbor, and her family and life were known to him from childhood.

But what did he know, what did anybody there know, of Charlotte Backson? She and her brother, the priest, had been only fourteen months altogether in Vitray. The year was commencing when they arrived, a year when the viscount went to flesh his maiden sword, as the poets say, with the native nobility in the army sent by King Louis XIII. to the siege of Angers against the Queen-Mother. When he returned home the Backsons were dwelling in the presbytery, where all the village spoke with pleasure of the lovely and affectionate union of brother and sister. It seemed to be mainly devotedness on the girl's part, for her brother George was a moody young man, who preferred solitude for his religious study. He kept everybody above the herd away from the beautiful sister, although her charms of person and spirit, and her quick use of the French language, here spoken in its utmost purity, pointed out that she was worthy a place in the best society. It was a great sacrifice on her part, for it was clear that she was not happy. The viscount, impressionable to wit and loveliness of a refined type, had but to see Charlotte to fall in love with her. For five months he had a hard battle to baffle the jealous, morose brother and get to speak to the well-guarded girl his earnest speeches,

which, it is but justice to state, might have been listened to by the purest, chastest virgin. She continued to shrink from the advances, and as for the hermit-like brother, both the viscount and his father failed to attract him to the castle, where, however, the priest is almost bound to be a frequent caller, to charm the tedium away.

Ferocious and shunning all men, while George the priest appeared to regard the young lord's furtive glances upon the cottage as an outrage, the girl acted as though he were committing a crime in frequenting the neighborhood. He had not spoken of his love, when the opportunity he had longed for, without any idea how to bring it nearer, was suddenly afforded him.

One night this personage, usually so quiet and full of mysterious peace, resounded with an unaccustomed din. The villagers were afraid to go up to their windows, far less to open the doors, as they heard the tramp of numerous horses in the street. In the morning, it was known that the priest had been abducted. The count was indignant at the outrage on a holy man, and on his grounds, but his son would not let the sister be questioned while her grief was strong. But she could not throw any light on the mystery. At least, the kidnapping had one bright point: it left the coast clear for the lover. Olivier presented himself to the girl, alone, defenceless, and offered himself as defender—not merely as lord expectant of the manor where the disaster had befallen her, but as one who loved her the more because of her unhappy state. She accepted his sympathy, and encouraged him to visit. At the end of the six months, he was inextricably infatuated.

He recapitulated this story to the girl, and appealed to her:

"Tell the truth, Charlotte; in all this time, though you have met me with kindliness for which I am grateful—tell me, have I once so much as grasped your hand without thanking you for the favor? have I once spoken of love without seeking for the pardon in your eyes? In short, have I once questioned you of who you are, whence you came, and how came your brother to disappear?"

"No, my lord. You have acted towards me like what you are, for all who know you—the most loyal and generous man in the realm."

He thanked her, bowing. She wondered what made him so persistent this time, for she was sure that he was not urged by vain inquisitiveness.

"Charlotte Backson, will you—can you speak this day with open heart? Give me some intelligence about yourself—your brother—your family—a piece of friendly confidence which, if you desire it, I shall lock up in my heart like a personal secret. Will you not? or, I repeat, can you not?"

"On myself and my family?" said she, going over to a small iron-clasped chest of bog oak, and taking from it some parchments. "Here you may see vouchers answering for me. Read. my lord, for though English, the heralds of England write in

Norman French, which you will understand better than I; they will prove that the Backsons come of gentle, not to say illustrious, blood. As for my brother, his secrets are not mine."

The young noble seemed relieved after glancing over the pedigree and other ancestral proofs.

"Never mind your brother," he said, hastily; "it will be time to question him when we meet again—"

"You will never see him more," she replied, with a shudder of dread which she could not entirely repress.

From the scrolls it could be gathered that Charlotte's father was one Sir William Backson, a landed gentleman of Wales, and her mother a Frenchwoman named Anna de Beuil; this, perhaps, accounted for her Saxon beauty and her facility in speaking French. The latter died three years after her husband, and Charlotte had been five years a whole orphan.

"An elder brother," said she, "by a former marriage, will inherit what estate there is. As a younger son, my brother George had to enter the priestly state, as he had no money to make his way in the army. Persecution drove him out of England, and he took me with him. He was always fond of me!" she said, with a peculiar expression.

She ceased to speak, and closed her lips firmly, as if here ended all that would be drawn from her. The viscount believed he had drawn all the facts which interested him, and he hastened to say:

"Then you are alone in the world, Charlotte, with nobody possessing any rights over you? and your heart is free?" he finally asked, with more hesitation.

"I thought I had given you to understand that I loved you," she said, with a low voice, but a brightening eye and a coloring cheek.

"In that case, Charlotte Backson, will you become my wife?" he boldly demanded.

"What do I hear?" she faltered, lowering her eyes to hide the ray of triumph.

"A plain thing, Charlotte, since I love you and I am loved by you."

While her lips seemed framing the assent, they suddenly turned pale, and instead, she said in fright: "You forget—your father!"

A father of a lover who had the power to deal out justice and to impose the death penalty was not to be despised in those days, especially by a foreigner.

The young man was evidently daunted, but recovering his coolness, after one fond look on the prize for which he was striving, he said:

"Listen to me, Charlotte; here is the sacrifice I must beseech. I ask it of you in trust you will consent. A public marriage not according to my father's wishes would sadden his last days. So you will not exact that from me—you will accept a secret union?"

She made a reverence, and intimated that she was her lord's obedient servant.

This little pleasantry delighted the young man, who had always been most deferential to the queenly beauty. Set at ease, the young couple thus plighted sat down in the window, and she smiled as if already she might wear the honored title of the Countess de la Fere. In her mind she had not long to wait, as the count was old, and suffering from an incurable disorder. They hoped to be happy enough in silence and obscurity. The viscount had the nuptials arranged. The new priest, due that day at the castle, was a companion of his, and knowing of the love-affair, had consented to celebrate the clandestine wedding.

"In an hour's time," continued Olivier, "you must go into the church, where one of the chapels will be lighted up. You will hear the bell ring. As we stand hand in hand, we will swear eternal love, and heaven will perchance hear us more favorably in that modest village church than the vows of royal couples in the magnificent cathedrals!"

Drawing from his breast a small casket, he showed her the family diamonds which would soon be hers, and her eyes glittered not less brilliantly. Among the jewels was a splendid sapphire which he said was specially given him by his mother for his bride when she bade him the everlasting farewell.

As if the jewel-case weighed her down, Charlotte kept her seat after her betrothed's departure to greet his father, as was his rule daily. The prospect did not seem realizable even now, with his promise ringing in her ears. She had cherished ardent dreams of ambition, but she had not expected to reach this point so soon. From the cottage to the castle was but a step, but maidens as fair had stumbled, never to rise again, before they attained the portals. Something stronger than fancy had prompted her to say, a while back, that the road into the castle ran through this hovel. She could not believe, had it not been for the lapful of gems, the golden circlet in which the sapphire glistened on her finger as the engagement-ring, and the diamond tiara which she placed on her brow. She seemed to the manor born, for her hand did not tremble as she touched those luminous stars from earth which are the constellations of queens.

She was so enrapt in the contemplation, forgetting the little time she had to dress, when a shadow flitted by the window, and she instinctively replaced the jewels in the case and sprung up. But if she had the intention to close the door, she was too late.

A tall, athletic young man, standing on the threshold, held it open.

"What do you want? Who are you?" she faltered, for his mien was impressive, and his look stern and authoritative.

"Are you named Mdlle. Charlotte Backson?" he said, roughly.

"It is I—well?" The inmate of the cottage was not the priest's housekeeper now, but the bride of a viscount.

"A man who has important news for you wants to know if

he may speak with you for a quarter of an hour without being disturbed?"

"I dare say he can," she replied, without well knowing what she said.

"George," said the stranger, to a third person without, whose steps were heard at once cautiously approaching, "you can come. Go in. Fear nothing. I will be on the lookout."

At the name, the girl had curbed any desire to raise a clamor. On the contrary, she ran to the door at the foot of the steps up which Claudette had gone and secured it with the bar. When she turned round, a young man with a gloomy expression, who entered muffled in a cloak, had thrown it aside, and dashing down his slouch hat, exclaimed:

"Charlotte, my treasure, my love, my life!"

Thrusting the case of jewels into the folds of her dress, the girl recoiled from the priest whom she had expected never to see again, as she had assured the viscount.

"It is I, Charlotte; answer, do you not recognize me?"

She sank into a seat, muttering, "He, here!"

He fell on his knees before her, saying in an impassioned voice:

"It is strange indeed, incredible, unheard-of, I grant! Oh, the joy of seeing you once more, and handsomer than ever."

No doubt, the promise and the glitter of the jewels still dancing in her eyes had enhanced their lustre and dyed her lips and cheeks with juice of roses.

"How did you get away?" she said, feeling that she must say something to a brother after six months' absence.

"Oh, don't ask me," he said, springing up and walking up and down in agitation. "I do not know—I have forgotten. Enough that I see you and speak to you again after half a year of torture from losing you. But you will obliterate them?"

"Poor George!" but her tone was hollow.

"Do you pity me for what I have endured in the prison?"

"Not so much that as for what they will inflict doubly upon you if recaptured. Imprudent man—you must not dally here, where they caught you before."

"Cease to pity me—if I have your love, I am still the happiest man in the world."

"I tell you, you are lost if you linger here."

"I am not likely to linger—it is only a flying visit."

"Going?" she cried out with delight.

"Yes," he said, slowly; "listen to me while I make you happy. You see, I am free, and I have money—five hundred pistoles—the wherewithal to buy a large farm in Canada and live till the harvest is reaped. We can easily get to the seaside from here, and once embarked on some ship, we may reach Quebec in five or six weeks. There no one will want an account of our past. We need play hide-and-seek no more; fear nothing—it will be making a new life." It is impossible to depict the gladness with which the escaped prisoner spoke, but it was not reflected on the

stolid listener's countenance. "Oh, the life of freedom and delight! You are strong and brave, fit for the colonist's life—let us go! Come, my love—come!"

"Impossible, George," she replied, contemptuously. "Five hundred pistoles is a trifle—in Canada is exile."

"That sum is more than ample to found a fortune there; and exile is unknown where love abides."

"Quite so, if true love," she negligently responded.

"Great heavens, Charlotte! do you no longer love me? those vows we interchanged?"

"So many woes have arisen from those vows that we should be sure they were impious."

"But, bear in mind, Charlotte," he wildly persisted, "everything links us to each other—our love, our sorrows, our crime!"

"You are wrong there, George," was her reply: "everything separates us: a living remorse to one another, we ought to dwell apart."

Her syllables fell like drops of ice-water on the man's heated brain.

"In the name of our love!" he appealed.

With a gesture she repulsed him, and as this caused the jewel-case to protrude from her pocket, she took it out and placed it near her hand on the table where she sat calmly.

"Our love was the crazy fancy of two young persons, isolated, and forgetting man and heaven—to think of it any more would be to defy Heaven."

He was not listening to her, for he had perceived the jewel-case.

"What have you there, Charlotte?" he asked.

"Begone," said she, not heeding him; "you are free, and I am glad of it," she went on, with a double meaning. "Do not ask me more."

"That is a jewel-case," said he, hoarsely, "and I know the arms engraved on the lid—they are those of the lord of this manor of La Fere."

"Prison fare has not weakened your eyesight; these are the arms of La Fere—they will be mine soon—for these gems form my wedding presents—the rich and noble young viscount is about to marry me. You can go and tell him the truth, and ruin all, but it will be acting like a coward."

He could not believe that this was his Charlotte speaking; the dreadful coldness chilled him to the depths of his soul, and he could doubt this was ever the girl he had loved. He took her in his arms, not lovingly, as of old, but as though to learn whether she had not been transformed into a statue. How could she refuse this chance to go with him into the New World, where they might be proudly man and wife, instead of pretending to be brother and sister in this village. He began to repeat his plea, but she cautioned him not to be overheard by Claudette above, and he lowered his voice, for he did not desire to raise an alarm. Her hand was chilling, and her heart beat with the

regularity of a machine. He shrunk from her as from a bronze image. It was madness to love this simulacrum of a woman. Nevertheless, although her demeanor had confirmed him in his resolution, he attempted a last appeal. He fell on his knees.

"Oh, if one spark remains in your bosom of our former love, and my words can revive it to a flame, let us be happy again and forever."

"Well, we can be happy—you in America—I, where I please; but we cannot be happy together."

Suddenly she became animated: the chapel bell tinkled.

"That bell summons me," she said. "I am in your hands, for you to decide on my fate."

"You are to be married—there now?" he exclaimed, as if at the same time some fiend plucked the heart out of him. "Go, Charlotte, you are free. You will not find me here when you return."

"Thank you," she said without irony and offered him her hand. To a prisoner out of jail, this should have been a favor, but he spurned it.

"Farewell forever, my lady the countess," he said.

She took up the case of jewels, and proudly swept by him to unbar the door and go up the stairs to the room where she would array herself in the virginal white which, this conversation revealed, hardly accorded with her character at heart.

Scarcely had the door closed behind her than the front one opened, and the grim man who had so terrified her walked in. On seeing the rejected lover in a chair, disheartened, muttering "Heaven!" in a despairing tone, he sighed heavily and asked him how the interview had passed off.

"Brother, it is true," said George mournfully. "What you said has come into reality."

"Then you see now that this thing has no soul?"

The unhappy young man bowed his head.

"Then, too, you must scorn her as the vilest of the vile."

"I do," was George's emphatic answer; "but myself more."

"That is well," said the other: "take up your cloak and hat, and let us set out, for we must be on the march all night, so that by daybreak you will be out of the reach of the captors."

The elder brother, who thus spoke, was endowed with superior vigor, for he seemed to inspire the younger, who rose, and with sombre but firm resolve, said:

"Indeed, I shall be out of their reach by to-morrow's sun, dear brother."

The tone was so strange that he looked at him hard, but while the young man's expression contained scorn, it was tempered with affection.

"Yes, I despise her, but still I love her, and I cannot live without her."

"Heaven help you," sighed the other.

"I shall die of this love."

"Death, George, is a grave and awful thought," said he solemnly; "think of what you say."

It was the tone of one with whom Death moved often, shoulder to shoulder.

He knew that his brother, confined in prison far from this enchantress, had only thought of saving himself to rejoin her. When he had helped him to liberty, George had thanked him and said that life was nothing without her; but he had not heard him mutter as he crossed the cottage sill, "If she does not love me, I shall die." He told him so now.

"Woman's love is a very frivolous episode in that tragic poem, a man's life," said the moralist.

"Yes, to him who has wealth, pleasures, and a future, but to the man with nothing, it is everything. Brother, you ought to know that life is a burden to me, and it weighs on others through my misdeeds. When the doom was uttered against me you passed me a pistol into the prison, of which I made no use. But give me it now, and its bullet will not be wasted."

The determination was so evidently immutable that his brother drew a pistol from his belt and handed it to him with an unfaltering hand. Then he put his arm round him and tenderly embraced him. The younger sobbed convulsively on that breast where he had ever found a refuge and breaking away, he rushed from the cottage, without disguise, and with the pistol in his hand.

Left to himself, hearing overhead the two treads—the heavy one of Claudette, awkwardly playing the tiring-maid to the bride, and the latter's light and gleeful tripping—the grim brother shook his clinched hand beneath the heartless woman and said:

"Farewell, my brother! this creature shall yet die more ignominiously than you—but, first, she shall bear to that day the same brand as you."

And going to the fireplace and seeking the hottest part of the live embers, he thrust into the fire a small iron instrument with a wooden handle.

Shortly afterward, in a snowy robe, with diamond earrings and a string of pearls which she could not forbear to borrow from the jewel-case, Charlotte hurried down the stairs.

"Joy—George is gone," she exclaimed, not perceiving the other, who rose from his stooping attitude to blow up the flame.

"Ay, but *I* have stayed," said he.

"Who are you?" she demanded, paralyzed abruptly with dread.

"You will know soon enough," And he fastened the upstairs door with the bar, and to prevent her moving it, drove a dagger into the oak above it with a strong hand.

She made a step to reach the outer door, but in two strides he thrust himself between, and, without knowing why, she shrunk from contact with even the air of his movement.

"Don't come near me," she gasped, still shrinking, "or I shall call for help!"

"Silence!" he hissed, like one whose appearance imposed what he commanded, and who rarely had to call for it.

"George, George," she said, less loudly.

"Oh, you call upon him now, do you?" he sneered.

"Oh, where has he gone?"

"I will tell you where he has gone; but first let me tell you whence he came."

Shivering in her robe as if it were one of snow indeed, she murmured "God have mercy!" but listened and fixed her eyes on him with an unaccountable fascination.

"That boy had a good and noble heart, and, born for the service of heaven, he would have lived for his own salvation and others, had not the devil, under the shape of a surpassingly fair young girl, as of olden time he appeared, come to him and tempted him. They had to suffer the penalties of the first false step, for such connections cannot last without the ruin of both. The wicked girl urged George to leave that part of the country. But to quit France, or even to gain another part where they might dwell tranquil, money was needed, with which neither was supplied. The priest stole the sacred vessels and sold the precious metal."

She knew the story from this point. She had been the sacrilegious culprit's Egeria, guiding him into Berry, where they gave out that they came from England. In Vitray, they came to a haven, and they might have reposed there as soundly as the guilty ever rest; but the unappeasable lust of the beauty for fresh conquests caused her to cast her net upon the young lord of the manor. Gossips tattled far and near, and one of those human weasels who are called "informers," and live on the betrayal of men, had his suspicions aroused and penetrated to the village. Finding the description correspond, he reported to the justices of Bethune, who, to prevent the scandal of arresting a priest in broad day among his flock, sent an armed troop to bear him away at midnight to hand him over to the ecclesiastical court. Luckily for Charlotte, she was taken for the housekeeper, and he alone was dragged off to jail. He continued to shield her, by taking all the guilt on himself, and it was he alone who was condemned to be branded and to row in the galleys for life.

"Perhaps he told you all this," said the man, "but I believe you were ignorant of one thing: George's brother is the executioner of Bethune—"

"His brother—you an executioner?" repeated Charlotte, paler than the pearls on her throat and speaking with loathing and horror.

"The executioner of Bethune," he said, with that strange pride of the profession which had its honorary side, and to which a family were consigned during generations. "And Bethune is the town where George was tried, and condemned, and handed over to the civil authorities for the sentence to be carried out.

The brother, you see, was compelled to brand the brother."

"Never! he should have—"

"Wait," said the headsman, with a curious and sad smile; "the executioner passed a pistol into the prison to his brother, that he might put an end to his misery, but the poor mad boy wanted to live: he hoped, though branded, to see her again. So he lived, was branded, shown on the pillory, and sent to the galleys."

"Oh, horror," moaned Charlotte, shuddering as if the hot iron were held over her.

"What was the brother's sole thought? To give the wretch his liberty. He waylaid the train of galley slaves and managed to set him free. But instead of fleeing, the fool was bent on seeing her once more who had destroyed him morally and bodily. He had offered her his good name—he came here to offer her the end of his branded life; but she refused, because she is going to marry another."

"Where is he?" she reiterated hoarsely, trying to straighten herself from the cowering attitude which the story had oppressed her into assuming. "There may be time—he is still alive—"

She made a movement towards the door, but at that same instant the report of firearms was heard from the copse at the back of the cottage, from the little arbor where—she remembered so well—they had passed many an hour which that deluded one, at least, had deemed blissful.

"Did you hear that shot?" said the executioner calmly. "The disgrace of my family is no more."

"But let me live," sued Charlotte, on her knees, and lifting her clasped hands, which he clutched irresistibly in his left hand.

"Oh, you would rather have your life than go and join him? Be it so, then—" but with the other hand, stooping down as he dragged her half across the room, he took the white-hot iron out of the fire.

Brighter than the diamonds, the sparks that coruscated from it over her head fell upon her dress, but she was not conscious of it. Above all, as the brand that had seared her discarded lover's shoulder now approached her own, she thought of her beauty marred, and she uttered a choking howl which was like that of a she-wolf caught in the inexerable jaws of a trap.

"Now, go to the altar—now, go to the bridal bed, and if you are asked who applied that brand and wherefore, say, if you dare, that it was the sworn and hereditary deathsman of Bethune, and that it was the doom for sacrilege."

She sank down in a heap, moaning, and dragging over the blackened shoulder the mantle which George had left.

Without a glance of pity, the executioner, more grim and sombre than when he had first been seen by her, stalked by, carrying with him the hat of his brother.

Long after his departure, Charlotte remained inert in the same humbled position, until aroused by the repeated calls of the astonished Claudette.

"Open the door, mademoiselle—open the door," she said, "for here is my lord the viscount!"

The viscount! her new love—her husband! With a mighty effort she dashed the tears from her eyes, she sprung erect and repaired the disorder of her attire; she drew the mantle around her aching shoulder where the shameful iron still seemed pressed, and with a voice sweet though firm, she called out to the eager young noble on the porch step:

"Darling, your bride is coming!"

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE RETURN.

"WELL?" asked d'Artagnan, quite excited at this stage.

"Well, one day when she was hunting with her husband," continued Athos, in a low voice, and speaking very quickly, "she fell from her horse and fainted; the count flew to her help, and as she appeared to be oppressed by her clothes, he ripped them open with his poniard, and in so doing laid bare her shoulder; and he saw the fleur-de-lis!"

And Athos seized the last bottle that was left by the neck, put it to his mouth, and emptied it at a single draught, as he would have emptied an ordinary glass.

Then he let his head sink upon his two hands, whilst d'Artagnan stood up before him, terrified, stupefied.

"That has cured me of beautiful, poetical, and loving women," said Athos, after a considerable pause, raising his head, and forgetting to continue the apologue of the count,—"God grant you as much!—Drink!"

"Then she is dead?" stammered d'Artagnan.

"Of course!" said Athos. "Hanged! But hold out your glass. Some ham, my man!" cried Athos; "we don't half drink!"

"Good God! good God!" cried d'Artagnan, quite stunned by the relation of this horrible adventure.

"Taste some of this ham, d'Artagnan; it is exquisite," said Athos, cutting a slice, which he placed on the young man's plate. "What a pity it is there were only four like this in the cellar—I should have drunk fifty bottles more."

D'Artagnan could no longer endure this conversation, which had terrified away his senses; he felt quite bewildered, and allowing his head to sink upon his hand, he pretended to sleep.

"These young fellows can none of them drink," said Athos, looking at him with pity; "and yet this is one of the best of them, too!"

D'Artagnan, when awakening on the following morning, had every word of Athos as present to his memory as if they fell from his mouth; they had been impressed upon his mind. He went into his friend's chamber with a fixed determination of renewing the conversation of the preceding evening; but he found

Athos quite himself again—that is to say, the most shrewd and impenetrable of men. Besides which, the Musketeer, after having exchanged a hearty shake of the hand with him, broached the matter first.

"I was pretty drunk yesterday, d'Artagnan," said he; "I can tell that by my tongue, which was swollen and hot this morning, and by my pulse, which was very tremulous; I would lay a wager I uttered a thousand absurdities."

And while saying this he looked at his friend with an earnestness that embarrassed him.

"No," replied d'Artagnan, "if I recollect well what you said, it was nothing out of the common way."

"Indeed! you surprise me; I thought I had related a most lamentable history to you?" And he looked at the young man as if he would read to the very depths of his heart.

"Faith!" said d'Artagnan, "it would appear that I was more drunk than you, since I remember nothing of the kind."

But this did not deceive Athos, and he resumed:

"You cannot have failed to remark, my dear friend, that every one has his particular kind of drunkenness, sad or gay; my drunkenness is always sad, and when I am thoroughly intoxicated my mania is to relate all the ghost stories which my foolish nurse infused into my brain. That is my failing: a capital failing, I admit; but, with that exception, I am a good drinker."

Athos spoke this in so natural a manner that d'Artagnan was shaken in his conviction.

"Oh! it is that, then," replied the young man, anxious to find out the truth—"it is that, then, I remember, as we remember a dream,—we were speaking of hanging people."

"Ah! you see how it is," said Athos, becoming still paler, but yet attempting to laugh; "I was sure it was so—the hanging of people is my nightmare."

"Yes, yes," replied d'Artagnan, "I remember now; yes, it was about—stop a minute—yes, it was about a woman."

"That's it," replied Athos, becoming almost livid; "that is my grand history of the fair lady, and when I relate that, I must be drunk indeed."

"Yes, that was it," said d'Artagnan; "the history of a tall, fair lady, with blue eyes."

"Yes, who was hanged."

"By her husband, who was a nobleman of your acquaintance," continued d'Artagnan, looking intently at Athos.

"Well, you see how a man may compromise himself when he does not know what he says," replied Athos, shrugging his shoulders as if he thought himself an object of pity. "I certainly never will get drunk again, d'Artagnan,—it is too bad a habit."

D'Artagnan remained silent.

Then Athos, changing the conversation all at once,—

"By-the-bye, I thank you for the horse you have brought me," said he.

"It is to your mind?" asked d'Artagnan.

"Yes; but it is not a horse for hard work."

"You are mistaken; I have ridden him nearly ten leagues in less than an hour and a half, and he appeared no more distressed than if he had only made the tour of the Tuileries gardens."

"Ah, ah! you begin to awaken my regret."

"Regret?"

"Yes; I have parted with him."

"How?"

"Why, here is the simple fact: this morning I awoke at six o'clock, you were still fast asleep, and I did not know what to do with myself; I was still stupid from our yesterday's debauch. As I came into the public room I saw one of our Englishmen bargaining with a dealer for a horse, his own having died yesterday from bleeding. I drew near, and found he was bidding a hundred pistoles for a fine chestnut nag. 'Well,' said I, 'my good gentleman, I have a horse to sell, too.'

"'Ay, and a very fine one! I saw him yesterday—your friend's lackey was leading him.'

"'Do you think he is worth a hundred pistoles?'

"'Yes; will you sell him to me for that sum?'

"'No; but I will play with you for him.'

"'You will play with me?'

"'Yes.'

"'At what?'

"'At dice.'

"No sooner said than done, and I lost the horse. Ah, ah! but I regained your trappings and then mine. That's where we left off. That was a superb throw, so I left off there."

D'Artagnan breathed as if the whole hostelry had been removed from off his chest.

"But what is the use of harness without horses?"

"I have an idea concerning them."

"Athos, you keep me in a fever."

"Listen to me. You have not played for a long time, d'Artagnan; you ought, then, to have a good hand."

"Well, what then?"

"Well, the Englishmen and his companion are still here. I remarked that he regretted the horse furniture very much. You appear to think much of your horse. In your place, now, I would stake the furniture against the horse."

"But he will not be satisfied with one equipment."

"Stake both; I am not selfish, if you are."

"You would do so?" said d'Artagnan, undecided, so strongly did the confidence of Athos begin to prevail, unknown to himself.

"In one single throw."

"But, having lost the horses, I am particularly anxious to preserve the furniture."

"Stake your diamond, then!"

"This! No, thank you! that's quite another thing. Never! never!"

"The devil!" said Athos. "I would propose to you to stake Planchet, but the Englishman would not, perhaps, be willing."

"Decidedly, my dear Athos, I should like better not to risk anything."

"That's a pity," said Athos, coolly; "the Englishman is overflowing with pistoles. Good Lord! try one throw; one throw is soon thrown!"

"But if I lose?"

"Well, you will surrender the furniture."

"I will try one throw," said d'Artagnan.

Athos went in search of the Englishman, whom he found in the stable, examining the harness with a greedy eye. The opportunity was good. He proposed the conditions—the two furnitures against one horse, or a hundred pistoles, to choose. The Englishman calculated fast: the two sets were worth three hundred pistoles to them: he consented.

D'Artagnan threw the dice with a trembling hand, and turned up the number three; his paleness terrified Athos, who, however, contented himself with saying:

"That's a sad throw, comrade; you will have the horses fully equipped, monsieur."

The Englishman, quite triumphant, did not even give himself the trouble to shake the dice; he threw them on the table without looking at them, so sure was he of victory; d'Artagnan himself had turned on one side to conceal his ill-humor.

"There! there! there!" said Athos, with his quiet tone; "that throw of the dice is extraordinary. I have only witnessed such a one four times in my life. Two aces, gentlemen!"

The Englishman looked, and was seized with astonishment; d'Artagnan looked, and was seized with pleasure.

"The horse shall be restored to your lackey, monsieur."

"A moment!" said Athos; "with your permission, monsieur, I wish to speak a word with my friend."

"If you please."

Athos drew d'Artagnan on one side.

"You mean to take your horse, do you not?"

"Without doubt, I do."

"You are wrong, then. I would take the hundred pistoles; you know you have staked the trappings against the horse or a hundred pistoles, at your choice."

"Yes."

"Well, then, I would take the hundred pistoles. We want money to carry us back to Paris."

"I am much attached to that horse, Athos."

"And there, again, you are wrong; a horse slips and injures a joint, a horse stumbles and breaks his knees to the bone, a horse eats out of a manger in which a glandered horse has eaten; there is a horse, or rather a hundred pistoles, lost: a master must feed his horse, whilst, on the contrary, the hundred pistoles feed their master."

"But how shall we get back to Paris?"

"Upon our lackey's horses, pardieu! Never think of our steeds; anybody may see by our carriage that we are people of condition."

"Very pretty figures we shall cut upon ponies, whilst Aramis and Porthos will be caracolling upon their war steeds!"

"Aramis and Porthos!" cried Athos, and laughed more loudly than was his custom.

"What are you laughing at?" asked d'Artagnan, who did not at all comprehend the hilarity of his friend.

"Never mind!—do one thing or the other," said Athos.

"Your advice, then, is——"

"To take the hundred pistoles, d'Artagnan; with the hundred pistoles we can live well to the end of the month: we have undergone a great deal of fatigue, remember, and a little rest will do us no harm."

"I rest! Oh, no, Athos, the moment I am in Paris I shall prosecute my researches after that unfortuante woman."

"Well, you may be assured that your horse will not be half so serviceable to you for that purpose as the good gold coin;—take the hundred pistoles, my friend—take the hundred!"

D'Artagnan only required one reason to be satisfied. This last reason appeared convincing. Besides, he feared that by resisting longer he should appear selfish in the eyes of Athos; he acquiesced, then, and chose the hundred pistoles, which the Englishman paid down immediately.

They then determined to depart. Peace with the landlord, in addition to Athos's old horse, cost six pistoles; d'Artagnan and Athos took the nags of Planchet and Grimaud, and the two lackeys started on foot, carrying the saddles on their heads.

However ill our two friends were mounted, they soon got far in advance of their servants, and arrived at Crevecœur. From a distance they perceived Aramis, seated in a melancholy manner at his window, looking out, like *Sister Anne,* at the dust in the horizon.

"Hallo! ha! Aramis! what the devil are you doing there?" cried they.

"Ah! is that you, d'Artagnan and you, Athos?" said the young man. "I was reflecting upon the rapidity with which the blessings of this world leave us, and my English horse, which has just disappeared amidst a cloud of dust, has furnished me with a living image of the fragility of the things of the earth. Life itself may be resolved into three words: *Erat, est, fuit.*"

"Which means——" said d'Artagnan, who began to suspect the truth.

"Which means, that I have just been duped; sixty louis for a horse which, by the manner in which he goes, can do at least five leagues an hour."

D'Artagnan and Athos burst into a loud laugh.

"My dear d'Artagnan," said Aramis, "don't be angry with me, I beg of you; necessity has no law; besides, I am the person punished, as that rascally horse-dealer has robbed me of fifty

pistoles at least. Ah! you fellows are good managers! you ride on your lackeys' horses, and have your own gallant steeds led along carefully by hand, at short stages."

At the same instant a market cart, which had for some minutes appeared upon the Amiens road, pulled up at the auberge, and Planchet and Grimaud got out of it with the saddles on their heads. The carter was going to Paris, and had agreed, on condition of being prevented from feeling thirst upon the road, to convey the lackeys and their burdens thither.

"How is all this?" said Aramis, on seeing them arrive—"nothing but saddles?"

"Now do you understand?" said Athos.

"Oh, yes! all alike. I retained my furniture by instinct. Hola! Bazin! bring my new saddle, and carry it with those of these gentlemen."

"And what have you done with your curates?" asked d'Artagnan.

"Why, I invited them to a dinner the next day," replied Aramis; "they have some capital wine here; please to observe that in passing, I did my best to make them drunk;—then the curate forbade me to quit my uniform, and the Jesuit entreated me to get him made a Musketeer."

"Without a thesis!" cried d'Artagnan—"without a thesis! For my part, I request the thesis may be surpressed!"

"From that time," continued Aramis, "I have lived very agreeably. I have begun a poem in verse of one syllable! That is rather difficult, but the merit in all things consists in the difficulty. The matter is tasty. I will read the first canto to you; it has four hundred verses, and lasts a minute."

"Faith! my dear Aramis," said d'Artagnan, who detested verses almost as much as he did Latin, "add to the merit of the difficulty that of the brevity, and you are sure that your poem will at least have two merits."

"Ah, but you will see," continued Aramis, "that it breathes irreproachable passion.—And so, my friends, we are returning to Paris? Bravo! I am ready; we are going to rejoin that good fellow, Porthos! So much the better. You can't think how I have missed him, the great simpleton. He would not sell his horse; not for a kingdom! I think I can see him now, mounted upon his superb animal and seated in his handsome saddle, looking like the Great Mogul!"

They made a halt for an hour, to refresh their horses: Aramis discharged his bill, placed Bazin in the cart with his comrades, and they set forward to join Porthos.

They found him up, less pale than when d'Artagnan left him, and seated at a table, on which, though he was alone, was spread enough for four persons; this dinner consisted of viands nicely dressed, choice wines, and superb fruit.

"Ah! pardieu!" said he, rising, you come in the nick of time; gentlemen, I was just beginning the potage, and you will dine with me."

"Oh, oh!" said d'Artagnan, "these bottles are not the fruits of Mousqueton's *lasso!* besides, here is a filet and a veal stew."

"I am recruiting myself," said Porthos—"I am recruiting myself; nothing weakens a man more than these cursed strains. Did you ever suffer from a strain, Athos?"

"Never!—only I remember that when in our affair of the Rue Ferou, I received a sword-wound, which at the end of fifteen or eighteen days produced exactly the same effect."

"But this dinner was not intended for you alone, Porthos?" said Aramis.

"No," said Porthos; "I expected some gentlemen of the neighborhood, who have just sent me word they could not come; you will take their places, and I shall not lose by the exchange. Hola, Mousqueton! seats, and order the number of bottles to be doubled."

"Do you know what we are eating here?" said Athos, at the expiration of about ten minutes.

"Pardieu!" replied d'Artagnan, "for my part, I am eating veal and cardoons with marrow."

"And I," said Porthos, "lamb chops."

"And I," said Aramis, "white meat of fowl."

"You are all mistaken, gentlemen," answered Athos, with a serious countenance; "you are all eating Porthos's horse, and perhaps his saddle."

"No, no, gentlemen, I have kept the harness," said Porthos.

"Faith," said Aramis, "we are all bad alike; one would think we acted upon agreement."

"What could I do?" said Porthos; "this horse made my visitors ashamed of theirs, and I don't like to humble people."

"Then your duchess is still taking the waters?" asked d'Artagnan.

"Yes, still," replied Porthos. "And the governor of the province, one of the gentlemen I expected to-day, seemed to have such a wish for him that I gave him to him."

"Gave him?" cried d'Artagnan.

"Lord! yes, gave it to him; you can't call it anything but a gift," said Porthos, "for the animal was worth at least a hundred and fifty louis, and the stingy fellow would only give me eighty!"

"Without the saddle?" said Aramis.

"Yes, without the saddle."

"You will please to observe, gentlemen," said Athos, "that Porthos has made the best bargain of any of us."

And then commenced a roar of laughter in which they all joined, to the astonishment of poor Porthos; but when he was informed of the cause of their hilarity his laughter, according to custom, was more vociferous than anybody's.

"So, then, there is one comfort, we are all in cash," said d'Artagnan.

"Well, for my part," said Athos, "I found Aramis's Spanish

wine so good that I sent on a hamper of sixty bottles of it with the lackeys; that has weakened my purse a little."

"And I," said Aramis, "you can imagine that I had given almost my last sou to the church of Montdidier and the Jesuits of Amiens; that I, moreover, had formed engagements which I ought to have kept. I have ordered masses for myself, and for you, gentlemen, which will be said, gentlemen, and for which I have not the least doubt you will be very much the better."

"And I," said Porthos, "do you think my strain cost me nothing? without reckoning Mousqueton's wound, on account of which the surgeon was obliged to come twice a day, and who charged me double on account of Mousqueton's having allowed himself to be wounded in a part which people generally only show to an apothecary; so I advised him to try never to get wounded there any more."

"Ay, ay!" said Athos, exchanging a smile with d'Artagnan and Aramis; "it is very clear you acted nobly with regard to the poor lad; that is like a good master."

"In short," said Porthos, "when all my expenses are paid I shall have, at most, thirty crowns left."

"And I about ten pistoles," said Aramis.

"Well, then, it appears that we are the Crœsuses of the society. Now, then, let us calculate how much we possess in all."

"Four hundred and seventy-five livres!" said d'Artagnan, who reckoned like an Archimedes.

"Then, on our arrival in Paris we shall still have four hundred, besides the furniture," said Porthos.

"But our troop horses?" said Aramis.

"Well, of the four lackey's horses we will make two for the masters, for which we will draw lots; with the four hundred livres, we will make the half of one for one of the unmounted, and then we will give the turnings out of our pockets to d'Artagnan, who has a steady hand, and will go and play in the first hell we come to. There, that's arranged."

"Let us finish the dinner, then," said Porthos; "it's getting cold."

The friends, having set their minds at ease with regard to the future, did honor to the repast, the remains of which were abandoned to MM. Mousqueton, Bazin, Planchet, and Grimaud.

On arriving at Paris, d'Artagnan found a letter from M. de Treville, which informed him that, at his request, the King had promised that he should be admitted to the company of the Musketeers.

As this was the height of d'Artagnan's worldly ambition, apart, be it well understood, from his desire of finding Madame Bonacieux, he ran, full of joy, to seek his comrades, whom he had left only half an hour before, but whom he found very sad and deeply preoccupied. They were assembled in council at the residence of Athos, which always indicated an event of some seriousness. M. de Treville had intimated to them that, it being his Majesty's fixed intention to open the campaign on

the 1st of May, they must immediately get ready all their appointments. The four philosophers looked at each other in a state of bewilderment. M. de Treville never joked in matters relating to discipline.

"And what do you reckon your appointments will cost?" said d'Artagnan.

"Oh, we can scarcely venture to say. We have made our calculations with Spartan economy, and we each require fifteen hundred livres."

"Four times fifteen make sixty—ah! six thousand livres," said Athos.

"For my part, I think," said d'Artagnan, "with a thousand livres each—I do not speak as a Spartan, but as a proctor—"

This word roused Porthos.

"Stop!" said he, "I have an idea."

"Well, that's something; for my part, I have not the shadow of one," said Athos, coolly; "but as to d'Artagnan, the idea of belonging to *ours*, gentleman, has driven him out of his senses. A thousand livres! For my part, I declare I want two thousand."

"Four times two make eight, then," said Aramis; "it is eight thousand that we want to complete our appointments, of which appointments, it is true, we have already handsome saddles."

"Besides," said Athos, waiting till d'Artagnan, who went to thank M. de Treville, had shut the door,—"besides, there is that beautiful ring which beams from the finger of our friend. What the devil! d'Artagnan is too good a comrade to leave his brothers in embarrassment whilst he wears the ransom of a king on his finger."

CHAPTER XXIX.

HUNTING FOR THE EQUIPMENTS.

The most preoccupied of the four friends was certainly d'Artagnan, although d'Artagnan, in his quality of guard, would be much more easily equipped than messieurs the Musketeers, who were all very high; but our Gascon cadet was, as may have been observed, of a provident and almost avaricious character, and with that (explain the contradiction if you can) so vainglorious as almost to rival Porthos. To this preoccupation of his vanity, d'Artagnan, at this moment joined an uneasiness much less selfish. Notwithstanding all his inquiries respecting Mme. Bonacieux, he could obtain no intelligence of her. M. de Treville had spoken of her to the Queen; the Queen was ignorant where the mercer's young wife was, but had promised to have her sought for. But this promise was very vague, and did not at all reassure d'Artagnan.

Athos did not leave his chamber; he made up his mind not to take a single step to provide for his equipment.

"We have still a fortnight before us," said he to his friends;

"well, if at the end of a fortnight I have found nothing, or, rather, if nothing has come to find me, as I am too good a Catholic to kill myself with a pistol-bullet, I will seek a good cause of quarrel with four of his Eminence's guards, or with eight Englishmen; I will fight until one of them has killed me, which, considering the number, cannot fail to happen. It will then be said of me that I died for the King, so that I shall have performed my duty without the expense of equipment."

Porthos continued to walk about, with his hands behind him, tossing his head, and repeating:

"I shall follow up my idea."

Aramis, anxious, and negligently dressed, said nothing.

It may be seen by these disastrous details that desolation reigned in the community.

The lackeys, on their part, like the coursers of Hippolytus, shared the sadness of their masters. Mousqueton collected a store of crusts; Bazin, always inclined to devotion, never quitted the churches; Planchet watched the flight of flies; and Grimaud, whom the general distress could not induce to break the silence imposed by his master, heaved sighs enough to soften stones.

The three friends—for, as we have said, Athos had sworn not to stir a foot to equip himself—the three friends went out early in the morning, and returned late at night. They wandered about the streets, looking at the pavements as if to see whether the passengers had not left a purse behind them. They might have been supposed to be following tracks, so attentive were they wherever they went. When they met they looked desolately at each other, as much as to say, "Have you found anything?"

However, as Porthos had first found an idea, and had thought of it earnestly afterwards, he was the first to act. He was a man of execution, this worthy Porthos. D'Artagnan perceived him one day walking towards the church of St. Leu, and followed him instinctively; he entered, after having twisted his moustache and elongated his royal, which always announced, on his part, the most conquering resolutions. As d'Artagnan took some precautions to conceal himself, Porthos believed he had not been seen. D'Artagnan entered behind him. Porthos went and leaned against the side of a pillar; d'Artagnan, still unperceived, supported himself against the other side of it.

There happened to be a sermon, which made the church very full. Porthos took advantage of this circumstance to ogle the women: thanks to the cares of Mousqueton, the exterior was far from announcing the distress of the interior; his hat was a little napless, his feather was a little faded, his gold lace was a little tarnished, his laces were a trifle frayed; but in the obscurity of the church these things were not seen, and Porthos was still the handsome Porthos.

D'Artagnan observed, on the bench nearest to the pillar against which Porthos leaned, a sort of ripe beauty, rather yellow and rather dry, but erect and haughty under her black hood. The

eyes of Porthos were furtively cast upon this lady, and then roved about at large over the nave.

On her side, the lady, who from time to time blushed, darted with the rapidity of lightning a glance towards the inconstant Porthos, and then immediately the eyes of Porthos were sent wandering over the church anxiously.

It was plain that this was a mode of proceeding that piqued the lady in the black hood to the quick, for she bit her lips till they bled, scratched the top of her nose, and could not sit still in her seat.

Porthos, seeing this, retwisted his moustache, elongated his royal a second time, and began to make signals to a beautiful lady who was near the choir, and who not only was a beautiful lady, but, still further, no doubt, a great lady, for she had behind her a negro boy, who had brought the cushion on which she knelt, and a female servant who held the coat-of-arms-marked bag, in which was placed the book from which she read the mass.

The lady with the black hood followed through all their wanderings the looks of Porthos, and perceived that they stopped upon the lady with the velvet cushion, the little negro, and the maid-servant.

During all this time Porthos played close; it was almost imperceptible motions of his eyes, fingers placed upon the lips, little assassinating smiles, which really did assassinate the disdained beauty.

Then she uttered, in form of *mea culpa,* and striking her breast, a *hum!* so vigorous that everybody, even the lady with the red cushion, turned round towards her. Porthos paid no attention; nevertheless, he understood it all, but was as deaf as the pillar he leaned against.

The lady with the red cushion produced a great effect—for she was very handsome—upon the lady with the black hood, who saw in her a rival really to be dreaded; a great effect upon Porthos, who thought her much more pretty than the lady with the black hood; a great effect upon d'Artagnan, who recognized in her the lady of Meung, of Calais, and Dover, whom his persecutor, the man with the scar, had saluted by the name of My Lady.

D'Artagnan, without losing sight of the lady of the red cushion, continued to watch the proceedings of Porthos, which amused him greatly; he directly guessed that the lady of the black hood was the procureur's wife of the Reu aux Ours, which was the more probable from the church of St. Leu being contiguous to that locality.

He guessed, likewise, that Porthos was taking his revenge for the defeat of Chantilly, when the procureuse had proved so refractory with respect to her purse.

But, amidst all this, d'Artagnan remarked also that not one countenance responded to the gallantries of Porthos. There was nothing but chimeras and illusions; but for real love, for true jealousy, is there any reality but illusions and chimeras?

The sermon was over, the procureuse advanced towards the holy water; Porthos went before her, and, instead of a finger, dipped his whole hand in. The procureuse smiled, thinking it was for her that Porthos put himself to this expense; but she was cruelly and promptly undeceived: when she was only about three steps from him, he turned his head round, fixing his eyes invariably upon the lady of the red cushion, who had risen and was approaching, followed by her black boy and her fille-de chambre. When the lady of the red cushion came close to Porthos, Porthos drew his dripping hand from the holy water font. The fair worshipper touched the great hand of Porthos with her delicate fingers, smiled, made the sign of the cross, and left the church.

This was too much for the procureuse; she entertained no doubt that there was an affair of gallantry between this lady and Porthos. If she had been a great lady she would have fainted, but as she was only a procureuse, she contented herself with saying to the Musketeer, with concentrated fury:

"Eh, M. Porthos, you don't offer *me* any holy water?"

Porthos, at the sound of that voice, started like a man awakened from a sleep of a hundred years.

"Ma—madame!" cried he; "is that you? How is your husband, our dear Monsieur Coquenard? Is he still as stingy as ever? Where can my eyes have been not to have even perceived you during the two hours the sermon has lasted."

"I was within two paces of you, monsieur," replied the procureuse; "but you did not perceive me, because you had no eyes but for the pretty lady to whom you just now gave the holy water."

Porthos pretended to be confused.

"Ah," said he, "you have remarked."

"I must have been blind if I had not."

"Yes," said Porthos, "that is a duchess of my acquaintance, with whom I have great trouble to meet, on account of the jealousy of her husband, and who sent me word that she should come to-day, solely for the purpose of seeing me in this poor church, buried in this vile quarter."

"Monsieur Porthos," said the procureuse, "will you have the kindness to offer me your arm for five minutes? I have something to say to you."

"Certainly, madame," said Porthos, winking to himself, as a gambler does who laughs at the dupe he is about to pluck.

At that moment d'Artagnan passed in pursuit of My Lady; he cast a passing glance at Porthos, and beheld his triumphant look.

"Eh, eh!" said he, reasoning to himself, according to the strangely easy morality of that gallant period, "there is one, at least, in the road to be equipped in time."

Porthos, yielding to the pressure of the arm of the procureuse, as a barque yields to the rudder, arrived at the Cloisters St. Magloire, a very unfrequented passage, enclosed with a turnstile

at each end. In the daytime nobody was seen there but beggars devouring their crusts, and children playing.

"Ah, M. Porthos," cried the procureuse, when she was assured that no one a stranger to the population of the locality could either see or hear her, "ah, you are a great ladykiller, it appears!"

"Who—I, madame?" said Porthos, drawing himself up proudly; "how so?",

"Look at the proofs of it, just now, and the holy water! But that must be a princess at least, that lady with her negro boy and her maid!"

"Pardieu! madam, you are deceived; she is simply a duchess."

"And that running footman who waited at the door, and that carriage with a coachman in grand livery, who sat waiting on his seat?"

Porthos had seen neither the footman nor the carriage, but with the eye of a jealous woman, Madame Conquenard had seen everything.

Porthos regretted that he had not at once made the lady of the red cushion a princess.

"Ah, you are quite the pet of the ladies, Monsieur Porthos!" resumed the procureuse with a sigh.

"Why, you may well imagine that, with the person with which nature has endowed me, I am not in want of ladies' favors."

"Good Lord! how quickly men forget!" cried the procureuse, raising her eyes towards heaven.

"Still less quickly than the women, in my opinion," replied Porthos; "as a proof, I, madame, I may say, I was your victim; when wounded, dying, I was abandoned by the surgeons; I, the offspring of a noble family, who placed reliance upon your friendship, I was near dying of my wounds at first, and of hunger afterwards, in a beggarly auberge at Chantilly, without your ever deigning once to reply to the burning letters I addressed to you."

"But, M. Porthos," murmured the procureuse, who began to feel that, to judge by the conduct of the great ladies of the time, she was wrong.

"I! who had sacrificed the Countess de Peaflor on your account!"

"Well, I know you did."

"The Baroness de——"

"Monsieur Porthos, do not overwhelm me quite!"

"The Countess de——"

"Monsieur Porthos, be generous!"

"You are right, madame, and I will not finish."

"But it was my husband who would not hear of lending."

"Madame Coquenard," said Porthos, "remember the first letter you wrote me, and which I preserve engraven in my memory."

The procureuse uttered a groan.

"Besides," said she, "the sum you required me to borrow was rather large; you said you wanted a thousand livres!"

"Madame Coquenard, I gave you the preference. I had but to write to the Duchess de——; but I won't repeat her name, for I am incapable of compromising a woman; but this I know, that I had but to write to her, and she would have sent me fifteen hundred."

The procureuse was piqued.

"Please to know, Monsieur Porthos," said she, "that my strong-box—strong-box of a procureuse as it may be—is better filled than those of your ruined minxes."

"That, then, doubles the offence," said Porthos, disengaging his arm from that of the procureuse; "for, if you are rich, Madame Coquenard, then there is no excuse for your refusal."

"When I said rich," replied the procureuse, who saw that she had gone too far, "you must not take the word for the letter. I am not precisely rich, I am only pretty well off."

"Hold, madame," said Porthos, let us say no more upon the subject, I beg of you. You don't know me,—all sympathy is extinct between us."

"Ungrateful man as you are!"

"Ah! I advise you to complain!" said Porthos.

"Begone, then, to your beautiful duchess; I will detain you no longer."

"Right: in a fortnight's time, as you know, or as you do not know, this fatal campaign is to open; I shall be fearfully engaged in providing for my equipment. Then I am obliged to make a journey to my family, in the lower part of Brittany, to obtain the sum necessary for my departure."

Porthos observed a last struggle between love and avarice.

"And as," continued he, "the duchess you saw at the church has estates near to those of my family, we mean to make the journey together. Journeys, you know, appear much shorter when we travel two in company."

"Have you no friends in Paris, then, M. Porthos?" said the procureuse.

"I thought I had," said Porthos, resuming his melancholy air; "but I have been bitterly taught that I was mistaken."

"You have some, M. Porthos!" cried the procureuse, in a transport that surprised even herself; "come to our house to-morrow. You are the son of my aunt, consequently my cousin; you come from Noyon, in Picardy; you have several lawsuits and no procureur. Can you recollect all that?"

"Perfectly, madame."

"Come at dinner-time."

"Very well."

"And be upon your guard before my husband, who is rather shrewd, notwithstanding his seventy-six years."

"Seventy-six years! Peste! that's a fine age!" replied Porthos.

"A great age, you mean, M. Porthos. Yes, the poor man may be expected to leave me a widow every hour," continued she,

throwing a significant glance at Porthos. "Fortunately, by our marriage-contract, the survivor takes everything."

"To-morrow, my angel!"

"To-morrow, flame of my life!"

CHAPTER XXX.

MY LADY.

D'ARTAGNAN followed My Lady, without being perceived by her; he saw her get into her carriage, and heard her order the coachman to drive to St. Germain.

It was useless to endeavor to keep pace on foot with a carriage drawn by two powerful horses; d'Artagnan returned then to the Rue Ferou.

In the Rue de Seine he met with Planchet, who had stopped before the house of a pastry-cook, and was contemplating with ecstasy a cake of the most appetizing appearance.

He ordered him to go and saddle two horses in M. de Treville's stables, one for himself, d'Artagnan, and one for Planchet. M. de Treville, on all common occasions, had allowed him the liberty to do so.

Planchet proceeded towards the Rue du Colombier, and d'Artagnan towards the Rue Ferou. Athos was at home, emptying in solitary sadness, one of his bottles of the famous Spanish wine he had brought back with him from his journey into Picardy. He made a sign for Grimaud to bring a glass for d'Artagnan, and Grimaud obeyed, still as silently as usual.

D'Artagnan related to Athos all that had passed at the church between Porthos and the lawyer's wife, and how their comrade was probably by that time in a fair way to be equipped.

"As for me," replied Athos to this recital, "I am quite at my ease; it will not be women that will defray the expense of my equipment."

"The more to blame, you; handsome, well-bred, noble as you are, my dear Athos, neither princesses nor queens would be secure."

"How young this d'Artagnan is!" said Athos, shrugging his shoulders, and making a sign to Grimaud to bring another bottle.

At that moment Planchet put his head modestly in at the half-open door and told his master that the horses were ready.

"What horses?" asked Athos.

"Two horses that M. de Treville lends me when I please, and with which I am now going to take a ride to St. Germain."

"Well, and what are you going to do at St. Germain?"

Then d'Artagnan described the meeting which, on his side, he had had at the church, and how he had found that lady who, with the seigneur in the black cloak, and with the scar near his temple, filled his mind constantly.

"That is to say, you are in love with this lady as you were

with Mme. Bonacieux," said Athos, shrugging his shoulders contemptuously, as if he pitied human weakness.

"I? not at all!" said d'Artagnan; "I am only curious to unravel the mystery to which she is attached. I do not know why, but I have a strong feeling that this woman, perfectly unknown to me as she is, and unknown to her as I am, has an influence over my life."

"Well, perhaps you are right," said Athos; "I do not know a woman that is worth the trouble of being sought for when she is once lost. Mme. Bonacieux is lost, so much the worse for her."

"No, Athos, no, you are mistaken," said d'Artagnan; "I love my poor Constance more than ever, and if I knew the place in which she is, were it at the end of the world, I would go and free her from the hands of her enemies; but I cannot find out where she is—all my researches have proved in vain. What is to be said? I must divert my attention by something!"

"Amuse yourself, then, with My Lady, my dear d'Artagnan; I wish you may with all my heart, if that will amuse you."

". Dear me Athos," said d'Artagnan, "instead of shutting yourself up here as if you were under arrest, get on horseback, and come and take a ride with me to St. Germain."

"My dear fellow," said Athos, "I ride horses when I have any; when I have none, I walk on foot."

"Well, on my part," said d'Artagnan, smiling at the misanthropy of Athos, which from any other person would certainly have offended him—"for my part, I ride what I can get; I am not so proud as you, Athos. So, *Au revoir,* my proud melancholy friend."

"*Au revoir,*" said the Musketeer, making a sign to Grimaud to uncork the bottle he had just brought.

D'Artagnan and Planchet got into the saddle, and took the road to St. Germain.

As he rode along, that which Athos had said respecting Mme. Bonacieux recurred to the mind of the young man. Although d'Artagnan was not of a very sentimental character the mercer's pretty wife had made a real impression upon his heart.

As he said, he was ready to go to the end of the world to seek her; but the world being round, it has many ends, so that he did not know which way to turn; in the meantime, he was going to try to find out who My Lady was. My Lady had spoken to the man in the black cloak, therefore she knew him. Now, in the opinion of d'Artagnan, it was certainly the man in the black cloak who had carried off Mme. Bonacieux the second time, as he had carried her off the first. D'Artagnan then only half lied, which is lying but little, when he said that by going in search of My Lady he at the same time went in search of Constance.

Thinking of all this, and from time to time giving a touch of the spur to his horse, d'Artagnan completed his short journey and arrived at St. Germain. He had just passed by the pavilion

in which ten years later Louis XIV. was to be born. He rode up a very quiet street, looking to the right and the left to see if he could catch any vestige of his beautiful Englishwoman, when from the terrace in front of a pretty house, which, according to the fashion of the time, had no window towards the street, he saw a face peep out with which he thought he was acquainted. This person walked along the terrace, which was ornamented with flowers. Planchet made out who it was first.

"Eh! master!" said he, addressing d'Artagnan, "don't you remember that face which is gaping about yonder?"

"No," said d'Artagnan; "and yet I am certain it is not the first time I have seen it."

"Parbleu! I believe it is not," said Planchet; "why it is poor Lubin, the lackey of the Count de Wardes—he whom you so well accommodated a month ago, at Calais, on the road to the governor's country-house."

"So it is!" said d'Artagnan; "I know him now. Do you think he would recollect you?"

"Ma foi! monsieur, he was in such trouble that I don't think he can have retained a very clear recollection of me."

"Well, go and get into conversation with him, and make out, if you can, whether his master is dead or not."

Planchet dismounted, and went straight up to Lubin, who did not at all remember him, and the two lackeys began to chat with the best understanding possible; whilst d'Artagnan turned the two horses into a lane, and went round the house, coming back to watch the conference from behind a hedge of nut-trees.

At the end of an instant's observation he heard the noise of a carriage, and speedily saw the lady stop opposite him. He could not be mistaken—My Lady was in it. D'Artagnan stooped down upon the neck of his horse, in order that he might see without being seen.

My Lady put her charming fair head out at the window, and gave her orders to her female attendant.

The latter, a pretty girl of about twenty years of age, active and lively, the true soubrette of a great lady, jumped from the step—upon which, according to the custom of the time, she was seated,—and took her way towards the terrace upon which d'Artagnan had perceived Lubin.

D'Artagnan followed the Abigail with his eyes, and saw her go towards the terrace. But it happened that some one in the house called Lubin, so that Planchet remained alone, looking in all directions for his master.

The chambermaid approached Planchet, whom she took for Lubin, and holding out a little billet to him—

"For your master," said she.

"For my master?" replied Planchet, in astonishment.

"Yes—and of consequence,—take it quickly."

Thereupon she ran towards the carriage, which had turned round towards the way it came, jumped upon the step, and the carriage drove off.

Planchet turned the billet on all sides; then, accustomed to passive obedience, he jumped down from the terrace, ran towards the lane, and at the end of twenty paces met d'Artagnan, who, having seen all, was coming to him.

"For you, master," said Planchet, presenting the billet to the young man.

"For me!" said d'Artagnan,—"are you sure of that?"

"I can't be more sure. The soubrette said, '*For your master.*' I have no other master but you; so—a pretty little lass!"

D'Artagnan opened the letter, and read these words:

"A person who takes more interest in you than she is willing to confess, wishes to know on what day it will suit you to walk in the forest? To-morrow, at the inn of the Field of the Cloth of Gold, a lackey in black and red will wait for your reply."

"Oh! oh!" said d'Artagnan, "this is rather warm; it appears that My Lady and I are anxious about the health of the same person. Well, Planchet, how is the good M. de Wardes! he is not dead, then?"

"Oh, no, monsieur, he is as well as a man can be with four sword-wounds in his body; for you, without question, inflicted four upon the dear gentleman, and he is still very weak, having lost almost all his blood. As I said, monsieur, Lubin did not know me, and told me our adventure from one end to the other."

"Well done, Planchet! you are the king of lackeys. Now jump up on your horse, and let us overtake the carriage."

They soon effected this. At the end of five minutes they perceived the carriage drawn up by the roadside; a cavalier, richly dressed, was close to the coach door.

The conversation between My Lady and the cavalier was so animated that d'Artagnan stopped on the other side of the carriage without any one but the pretty maid being aware of his presence.

The conversation took place in English,—a language which d'Artagnan could not understand; but, by the accent, the young man plainly saw that the beautiful Englishwoman was in a great rage: she terminated it by an action which left no doubt as to the nature of this conversation—this was a blow with her fan, applied with such force that the little feminine weapon flew into a thousand pieces.

The cavalier broke into a loud laugh, which appeared to exasperate My Lady still more.

D'Artagnan thought this was the moment to interfere; he approached the other door, and taking off his hat respectfully—

"Madame," said he, "will you permit me to offer you my services? It appears to me that this cavalier has made you very angry. Speak one word, madame, and I take upon myself to punish him for his want of courtesy."

At the first word, My Lady turned round, looking at the young man with astonishment; and when he had finished—

"Monsieur," said she, in very good French, "I should with

great confidence place myself under your protection if the person with whom I quarrel were not my brother."

"Ah! excuse me, then," said d'Artagnan; "you must be aware that I was ignorant of that, madame!"

"What is that stupid fellow troubling himself about?" cried the cavalier whom My Lady had designated as her brother, stooping down to the height of the coach window,—"why does not he go about his own business?"

"Stupid fellow yourself!" said d'Artagnan, stooping in his turn on the neck of his horse, and answering on his side through the carriage window, "I don't go on because it pleases me to stop here."

The cavalier addressed some words in English to his sister.

"I speak to you in French," said d'Artagnan; "be kind enough, then, to reply to me in the same language. You are madame's brother, I learn,—be it so; but, fortunately, you are not mine."

It might be thought that My Lady, timid as women are in general, would have interposed in this commencement of mutual provocations, in order to prevent the quarrel from going too far; but, on the contrary, she threw herself back in her carriage, and called out coolly to the coachman, "Go on—home!"

The pretty maid cast an anxious glance at d'Artagnan, whose good looks seemed to have made an impression upon her.

The carriage went on, and left the two men in face of each other; no material obstacle separated them.

The cavalier made a movement as if to follow the carriage; but d'Artagnan, whose anger, already excited, was much increased by recognizing in him the Englishman of Amiens, who had won his horse and was very near winning his diamond of Athos, caught at his bridle and stopped him.

"Well, monsieur!" said he, "you appear to be more stupid than I am, for you forget there is a little quarrel to arrange between us two. I hope you have a sword at home; but, at all events, I have two, and, if you like, I will throw with you for one of them."

"Quite unnecessary," said the Englishman; "I am well furnished with such sort of playthings."

"Very well! my worthy gentleman," replied d'Artagnan, "pick out the longest, and come and show it to me this evening."

"Where?"

"Behind the Luxembourg; that's a charming spot for such amusements as the one I propose to you."

"That will I do; I will be there."

"Your hour?"

"Six o'clock."

"Apropos, you have probably one or two friends?"

"Humph! I have three who would be honored by joining in the sport with me."

"Three! that's fortunate! That falls out oddly! Three is just my number!"

"Now then, who are you?" asked the Englishman.

"I am M. d'Artagnan, a Gascon gentleman, serving in the guards, in the company of M. Desessarts. And you?"

"I am Lord Winter, Baron of Sheffield."

"Well, then, I am your servant, monsieur le baron," said d'Artagnan.

And touching his horse with the spur, he cantered back to Paris.

As he was accustomed to do in all cases of any consequence, d'Artagnan went straight to the residence of Athos.

He found him reclining upon a large sofa, where he was waiting, as he said, for his equipment to come and find him.

He related to Athos all that had passed, except the letter to M. de Wardes.

Athos was delighted to find he was going to fight an Englishman. We are aware that that was his dream.

They immediately sent their lackeys for Porthos and Aramis, and on their arrival made them acquainted with the affair in hand.

Porthos drew his sword from the scabbard and made passes at the wall, springing back from time to time, and making contortions like a dancer.

Aramis, who was constantly at work at his poem, shut himself up in Athos's closet, and begged not to be disturbed before the moment of drawing swords.

Athos, by signs, desired Grimaud to bring another bottle of wine.

And d'Artagnan employed himself in arranging a little plan, of which we shall hereafter see the execution, and which promised him an agreeable end, as might be guessed by the smiles which from time to time passed over his countenance, the thoughtfulness of which they enlivened.

CHAPTER XXXI.

ENGLISH AND FRENCH.

THE hour being come, they, with their four lackeys, repaired to a spot behind the Luxembourg given up to the feeding of goats. Athos threw a piece of money to the goat-keeper to remove his flock to a distance. The lackeys were charged to act as sentinels.

A silent party soon drew near to the same enclosure. penetrated into it, and joined the Musketeers: then, according to the English custom, the presentations took place.

The Englishmen were all men of rank; consequently, the extraordinary names of their adversaries were, for them, not only a matter of surprise, but of concern.

"But, after all this," said Lord Winter, when the three friends had been named, "we do not know who you are; as gentlemen,

we cannot fight with such; why, they are nothing but actors' names."

"Therefore your lordship may suppose they are only assumed," said Athos.

"Which only gives us a greater desire to know the real ones," replied the lord.

"You gambled very willingly with us without knowing our names," said Athos, "as is plain by your having won our horses."

"That is true, but we then only risked our pistoles; this time we risk our blood; we play with anybody, but we only fight with our equals."

"And that is but fair," said Athos, and he took aside that one which whom he was to fight, and communicated his name in a low voice.

Porthos and Aramis did the same.

"Does that satisfy you?" said Athos to his adversary; "do you think me sufficiently noble to do me the honor of crossing swords with me?"

"Yes, my lord," said the Englishman, bowing.

"Well! now shall I tell you another thing?" said Athos, coolly.

"What is that?" replied the Englishman.

"Why, that is, that you would have acted much more wisely if you had not required me to make myself known. Because I am believed to be dead, and have reasons for wishing nobody should know I am living, so that I shall be obliged to kill you to prevent my secret getting wind."

The Englishman looked at Athos, believing that he was joking, but Athos was not joking the least in the world.

"Gentlemen," said Athos, addressing at the same time his companions and their adversaries, "are we ready?"

"Yes!" answered the English and the French, as with one voice.

"On guard, then!" cried Athos.

And immediately eight swords glittered in the rays of the setting sun, and the combat began with an animosity very natural to men who were doubly enemies.

Athos, the first, killed his adversary: he hit him but once, but, as he had foretold, that hit was a mortal one—the sword passed through his heart.

Porthos, the second, stretched his upon the grass, with a wound through his thigh; and as the Englishman, without making any further resistance, surrendered his sword, Porthos took him up in his arms and carried him to his carriage.

Aramis pushed him so vigorously that after going back fifty paces he finished by fairly taking to his heels, and disappeared amid the hooting of the lackeys.

As to d'Artagnan, he fought purely and simply on the defensive; and when he saw his adversary pretty well fatigued, with a vigorous side-thrust he twisted the sword from his grasp, and sent it glittering into the air. The baron, finding himself dis-

armed, took two or three paces back, but in this movement his foot slipped and he fell.

D'Artagnan was over him at a bound, and pointing his sword at his throat, said:

"I could kill you, my lord: you are completely at my mercy, but I spare your life for your sister's sake."

D'Artagnan was at the height of joy; he had realized the plan which he had fancied, the development of which had produced the smiles mentioned.

The Englishman, delighted at having to do with a gentleman of such a kind disposition, pressed d'Artagnan in his arms and paid a thousand compliments to the three Musketeers, and, as Porthos's adversary was already installed in the carriage, and as Aramis's had run away, they had nothing to think about but the defunct.

As Porthos and Aramis were undressing him in the hope of finding his wound not mortal a full purse dropped from his clothes. D'Artagnan picked it up and held it out to Lord Winter.

"What the deuce would you have me do with that?" said the Englishman.

"You can restore it to his family," said d'Artagnan.

"His family will care vastly about such a trifle as that! his family will inherit fifteen thousand guineas a year: keep the purse for your lackeys."

D'Artagnan put the purse into his pocket.

"And now, my young friend—if you will permit me, I hope to give you that name," said Lord Winter—"on this very evening, if agreeable to you, I will present you to my sister, Lady Clarke; for I am desirous that she should take you into her good graces; and as she is not in bad odor at court, she may perhaps, on some future day, speak a word that will not prove useless to you."

D'Artagnan blushed with pleasure, and bowed assent.

At this time Athos came up to d'Artagnan.

"What do you mean to do with that purse?" whispered he.

"Why, I meant to pass it over to you, my dear Athos."

Athos took the purse, and threw it into the hand of the coachman.

"For you and your fellows," said he.

This generosity in a man who was quite destitute struck even Porthos, and this trait, repeated by Lord Winter and his friend, was highly applauded by every one except Grimaud, Bazin, Mousqueton, and Planchet.

Lord Winter, on quitting d'Artagnan, gave him his sister's address—No. 6, Place Royale—then the fashionable quarter, and undertook to call for him to introduce him. D'Artagnan appointed eight o'clock, at Athos's residence.

This introduction to Lady Clarke occupied the head of our Gascon greatly. He remebered in what a strange manner this woman had hitherto been mixed up in his destiny. According

to his conviction, she was some myrmidon of the Cardinal's, and yet he felt himself invincibly drawn towards her by one of those sentiments for which we cannot account. His only fear was that My Lady would recognize in him the man of Meung and Dover. Then she knew that he was one of the friends of Treville, and, consequently, that he belonged body and soul to the King, which would make him lose a part of his advantage, since, when known to the lady as he knew her, he played only an equal game with her. As to the commencement of an intrigue between her and Wardes, our presumptuous hero gave but little heed to that, although the marquis was young, handsome, rich, and high in the Cardinal's favor. It is not for nothing we are but twenty years old, particularly if we were born at Tarbes.

D'Artagnan began by making his most splendid toilet; then returned to Athos's, and, according to his custom, related everything to him. Athos listened attentively to his projects; then shook his head, and recommended prudence to him with a shade of bitterness.

"What!" said he, "you have just lost one woman, who, you say, was good, charming, perfect, and here you are, running headlong after another!"

D'Artagnan felt the truth of this reproach.

"I loved Mme. Bonacieux with my heart, whilst I only love My Lady with my head," said he; "by getting introduced to her, my principal object is to ascertain what part she plays at court."

"The part she plays at court! It is not difficult to divine that, after all you have told me. She is some emissary of the Cardinal's; a woman who will draw you into a snare, in which you will leave your head."

"The devil! my dear Athos, you view things on the dark side, methinks."

"D'Artagnan, I mistrust women; can it be otherwise? I bought my experience dearly—particularly fair women. This lady is fair, you say?"

"She has the most beautiful light hair imaginable!"

"Ah! my poor d'Artagnan!" said Athos.

Lord de Winter arrived at the appointed time, but Athos, being notified of his coming, went into the other chamber. He found d'Artagnan alone there, and as it was nearly eight o'clock, he took the young man with him.

An elegant carriage waited below, and as it was drawn by two excellent horses, they were soon at Place Royale.

Lady Clarke received d'Artagnan ceremoniously. Her house was remarkably sumptuous; and whilst the most part of the English had quitted, or were about to quit France, on account of the war, My Lady had just been laying out much money upon her residence, which proved that the general measure which drove the English from France did not affect her.

"You see," said Lord Winter, presenting d'Artagnan to his sister, "a young gentleman who has held my life in his hands, and who has not abused his advantage, although we were doubly

enemies, as it was I insulted him, and I am an Englishman. Thank him, then, if you have any affection for me."

My Lady frowned slightly, a scarcely visible cloud passed over her brow, and so peculiar a smile appeared upon her lips, that the young man who saw and observed this triple shade almost shuddered at it.

The brother did not perceive this; he had turned round to play with My Lady's favorite monkey, which had pulled him by the doublet.

"You are welcome, sir," said My Lady, in a voice whose singular sweetness contrasted with the symptoms of ill-humor which d'Artagnan had just remarked,—"you have to-day acquired eternal rights to my gratitude."

The Englishman then turned round and described the duel without omitting a single detail. My Lady listened with the greatest attention, and yet it was easily to be perceived, whatever effort she made to conceal her impressions, that this recital was not agreeable to her. Blood rose to her head, and she bit her handkerchief with all her might.

That pretty little maid whom d'Artagnan had already observed, then came in; she spoke some words to Lord Winter in English; and he immediately requested d'Artagnan's permission to retire, excusing himself on account of the urgency of the business that called him away, and charging his sister to obtain his pardon.

D'Artagnan exchanged a shake of the hand with Lord Winter, and then returned to My Lady. Her countenance, with surprising mobility, had recovered its gracious expression, but some little red spots upon her handkerchief indicated that she had bitten her lips till the blood came. Those coral lips were magnificent!

The conversation took a cheerful turn. My Lady appeared to be entirely recovered. She told d'Artagnan that Lord Winter was her brother-in-law, and not her brother; she had married a younger brother of the family, who had left her a widow with one child. This child was the only heir to Lord Winter, if he did not marry. All this showed d'Artagnan that there was a veil which enveloped something, but he could not yet see under this veil.

In addition to this, after half an hour's conversation d'Artagnan was convinced that My Lady was French. She spoke it with an elegance and a purity that left no doubt on that head.

D'Artagnan was profuse in gallant speeches and protestations of devotedness. To all the simple things which escaped our Gascon My Lady replied with a smile of kindness. The hour for retiring arrived. D'Artagnan took leave, and left, the happiest of men.

Upon the stairs he met the pretty maid, who brushed gently against him as he passed, and then, blushing to the eyes, asked his pardon for having touched him, in a voice so sweet that the pardon was granted instantly.

D'Artagnan came again on the morrow, and was still better

received than on the day before. Lord Winter was not at home, and it was the lady who this time did all the honors of the evening. She appeared to take a great interest in him, asking him whence he came, who were his friends, and whether he had not at some times thought of attaching himself to the Cardinal.

D'Artagnan, who, as we have said, was exceedingly prudent for a young man of twenty, then remembered his suspicions regarding the lady; he launched into a eulogy of his Eminence, and said that he should not have failed to enter into the guards of the Cardinal instead of the King's guards if he had happened to know M. de Cavois instead of M. de Treville.

My Lady changed the conversation without any appearance of affectation, and asked d'Artagnan in the most careless manner possible if he had even been in England. D'Artagnan replied that he had been sent thither by M. de Treville to treat for horses, and that he had brought back four as specimens.

My Lady, in the course of her conversation, twice or thrice bit her lips; she had to deal with a Gascon who fenced close.

At the same hour as the preceding evening d'Artagnan retired. In the corridor he again met the pretty Kitty—that was the maid's name. She looked at him with an expression which it was impossible to mistake. But d'Artagnan was so preoccupied by the mistress that he remarked nothing but her.

D'Artagnan came again on the morrow and the day after that, and each day My Lady gave him a more gracious welcome.

Every evening, either in the antechamber, the corridor, or on the stairs, he met the pretty maid. But as we have said, d'Artagnan paid no attention to this.

CHAPTER XXXII.

MAID AND MISTRESS.

In the meantime, in spite of the cries of his conscience and the wise counsel of Athos, d'Artagnan became hourly more in love with My Lady; thus he never failed to pay his diurnal court to her, and the self-satisfied Gascon was convinced that sooner or later, she should not fail to respond to him.

One day when he arrived, with his head in the air, and as light at heart as a man who is in expectation of a shower of gold, he found the soubrette under the gateway of the hotel, but this time pretty Kitty was not contented with touching him as he passed; she took him gently by the hand.

"Good!" thought d'Artagnan, "she is charged with some message for me from her mistress; she is about to appoint some meeting which she has not the courage to speak of." And he looked down at the pretty girl with the most triumphant air imaginable.

"I wish to say three words to you, Monsieur le Chevalier," stammered the soubrette.

"Speak, my dear—speak," said d'Artagnan; "I am all attention."

"Here? That's impossible; that which I have to say is too long, and, still more, too secret."

And Kitty, who had not let go the hand of d'Artagnan, led him up a little, dark, winding staircase, and after ascending about fifteen steps, opened a door.

"Come in here, Chevalier," said she; "here we shall be alone, and can talk safely."

"And whose chamber is this, my pretty-faced friend?"

"It is mine, Chevalier; it communicates with my mistress's by that door. But you need not fear; she will not hear what we say; she never goes to bed before midnight."

D'Artagnan cast a glance around him. The little apartment was charming for its taste and neatness; but, in spite of himself, his eyes were directed to that door which Kitty said led to her lady's chamber.

Kitty guessed what was passing in the mind of the young man, and heaved a deep sigh.

"You love my mistress then, very dearly, Chevalier?" said she.

"Oh, more than I can say Kitty! I am mad for her."

Kitty breathed a second sigh.

"Alas!" said she, "that is a great pity!"

"What the devil do you see so pitiable in it?" said d'Artagnan.

"Because," replied Kitty, "my mistress does not love you at all; but you—you don't believe me?"

"Why I confess that, unless you give me some proof of what you advance——"

"What do you think of this?"

And Kitty drew a little note from her bosom.

"Read the address."

"The Count de Wardes."

The remembrance of the scene at St. Germain presented itself to the mind of the presumptuous Gascon; as quick as thought he tore open the letter:

You have not answered my first note; are you indisposed, or have you forgot the glances you favored me with at the ball of Madame de Guice? You have an opportunity now, count; do not allow it to escape.

D'Artagnan became very pale; he was wounded in his self-love; he thought that it was in his love.

"Poor, dear Monsieur d'Artagnan!", said Kitty, in a voice full of compassion, and pressing the young man's hand again.

"You pity me, my kind little creature?" said d'Artagnan. "You would do much better to assist me in revenging myself of your mistress."

"And what sort of revenge would you take?"

"I would triumph over her, and supplant my rival."

"I will never help you in that, Monsieur le Chevalier," said

Kitty, warmly, "my mistress will never love you, for you have offended her to the very heart."

"I?—in what way can I have offended her? I, who, ever since I have known her, have lived at her feet like a slave! Speak, I beg of you!"

"I will never confess that to the man———who should read to the bottom of my soul?"

D'Artagnan looked at Kitty for the second time. The young girl was of a freshness and beauty which many duchesses would have purchased with their coronets.

"Kitty," said he, "I will read to the bottom of your soul whenever you like; don't let that disturb you;" and he gave her a kiss, at which the poor girl became as red as a cherry.

"Oh, no," said Kitty, "it is not me you love—it is my mistress you love; you told me so only just now."

Almost at the same time the bell was rung in the lady's chamber.

"Goodness!" cried Kitty, "there is my mistress calling me! Go, go directly!"

D'Artagnan rose, took his hat as if it had ben his intention to obey; then, opening quickly the door of a large closet, instead of that of the staircase, he plunged into the midst of robes and dressing gowns.

"What are you doing?" cried Kitty.

D'Artagnan, who had secured the key, shut himself up in the closet without any reply.

"Well," cried My Lady, in a sharp voice, "are you asleep, that you don't answer when I ring?"

And d'Artagnan heard the door of communication opened violently.

"Here am I, My Lady! here am I!" cried Kitty, springing forward to meet her mistress.

Both went into the bedroom, and, as the door of communication remained open, d'Artagnan could hear My Lady for some time scolding her maid. She was at length, however, appeased, and the conversation turned upon him whilst Kitty was assisting her mistress to undress.

"Well," said My Lady, "I have not seen our Gascon this evening."

"What, My Lady, has he not been?" said Kitty. "Can he be inconstant before being happy?"

"Oh, no; he must have been prevented by M. de Treville or M. Desessarts. I understand my game, Kitty; I have him safe!"

"What will you do with him, madame?"

"What will I do with him? Oh, Kitty, there is something between that man and me that he is quite ignorant of: he was very near making me lose my credit with his Eminence. Oh, I will be revenged for that!"

"I thought My Lady loved him?"

"I, love him? I detest him! A simple fool, who held the

life of Lord Winter in his hands and did not kill him, by which I missed three hundred thousand a year!"

"That's true," said Kitty; "your son was the only heir of his uncle, and until his coming of age you would have had the enjoyment of his fortune."

D'Artagnan shuddered to his very marrow at hearing this apparently sweet creature reproach him with that sharp voice, which she took such pains to conceal in conversation, for not having killed a man whom he had seen load her with kindnesses.

'For all this," continued My Lady, "I should long ago have revenged myself on him, if, and I don't know why, the Cardinal had not requested me to conciliate him."

"Oh, yes; but My Lady has not favored the little woman he was so fond of?"

"What! the mercer's wife? Has he not already forgotten she ever existed? Fine vengeance that, indeed!"

Cold sweat broke from d'Artagnan's brow. Why, this woman was a monster! He resumed his listening, but unfortunately the toilet was ended.

"That will do," said My Lady; "go into your own room, and to-morrow endeavor again to obtain me an answer to the letter I gave you."

"For Lord de Wardes?" said Kitty.

"To be sure; for Lord de Wardes."

"Now, there is one," said Kitty, "who appears to me to be quite a different sort of man to our poor M. d'Artagnan."

"Go to bed, miss," said My Lady; "I don't like comments."

D'Artagnan heard the door close, then the grating of two bolts by which My Lady fastened herself in; on her side, but as softly as possible, Kitty turned the key of the lock, and then d'Artagnan opened the closet door.

"Oh, good Lord!" said Kitty, in a low voice, "what is the matter with you? How pale you are!"

"The abominable creature!" murmured d'Artagnan.

"Silence, silence, begone!" said Kitty; "there is nothing but a wainscot between my chamber and My Lady's; every word that is uttered in one can be heard in the other."

"That's exactly the reason I won't go," said d'Artagnan.

"What!" said Kitty, blushing.

"Or, at least, I will go—later!" and he put his arm round her waist.

D'Artagnan's love for Kitty was little more than an idea of vengeance upon My Lady. With a little more heart, he might have been contented with this new conquest; but the principal features of his character were ambition and pride. It must, however, be confessed, in his justification, that the first use he made of the influence he had obtained over Kitty was to endeavor to find out what had become of Madame Bonacieux; but the poor girl swore that she was entirely ignorant on that head, her mistress never admitting her into half her secrets; she believed she was not dead.

As to the cause which was near making My Lady lose the confidence of the Cardinal, Kitty knew nothing about it; but this time d'Artagnan was better informed than she was; as he had seen my lady on board a vessel at the moment he was leaving England, he suspected that it was, almost without a doubt, on account of the diamond studs.

But what was clearest in all this was, that the true, profound, and inveterate hatred of My Lady was increased by his not having killed her brother-in-law.

D'Artagnan came the next day to My Lady's, and finding her in a very ill-humor, had no doubt that it was having no answer from M. de Wardes that provoked her thus. Kitty came in, but My Lady was very cross with her. The poor girl ventured a glance at d'Artagnan, which said—See how I suffer on your account!

Towards the end of the evening, however, the beautiful lioness became milder, she smilingly listened to the soft speechs of d'Artagnan, and even gave him her hand to kiss.

D'Artagnan, at parting, scarcely knew what to think; but as he was a youth not easily imposed upon, whilst continuing to pay his court to My Lady, he determined to carry out the little plan he had framed in his mind.

He found Kitty at the gate, and, as on the preceding evening, went up to her chamber. Kitty had been accused of negligence, and consequently severely scolded. My Lady could not at all comprehend the silence of the Count de Wardes, and she ordered Kitty to come at nine o'clock in the morning to take a third letter.

D'Artagnan made Kitty promise to bring him that letter on the following morning; the poor girl promised all her lover desired; she was mad in love.

Things passed as they had done the night before: d'Artagnan concealed himself in his closet, My Lady called, undressed, sent away Kitty, and shut the door. As before, likewise, d'Artagnan returned home at five o'clock in the morning.

At eleven o'clock Kitty came to him: she held in her hand a fresh billet. This time the poor girl did not even hesitate at giving up the note to d'Artagnan, she belonged, body and soul, to her handsome soldier.

D'Artagnan opened the letter, and read as follows:

This is the third time I have written to you, to tell you that I love you. Beware that I do not write to you a fourth time, to tell you that I detest you.

If you repent of the manner in which you have acted towards me, the girl who brings this will tell you how a man of spirit may obtain his pardon.

D'Artagnan colored and grew pale several times whilst reading this billet.

"Oh! you love her still," said Kitty, who had not taken her eyes off the young man's countenance for an instant.

"No, Kitty, you are mistaken, I do not love her; but I will revenge myself for her contempt of me."

"Oh! yes, I know what sort of vengeance! you told me that!"

"Oh what consequence can it be to you, Kitty? You know it is you alone I love."

"How can I be sure of that?"

"By the scorn I will throw upon her."

D'Artagnan took a pen and wrote:

MADAME, Until the present moment, I could not believe that it was to me your two first letters were addressed, so unworthy did I feel myself of such an honor; besides, I was so seriously indisposed, that I could not, in any case, have replied to them.

But now I am forced to believe in the excess of your kindness, since not only your letter, but your servant, assures me that I have the good fortune to be beloved by you.

She has no occasion to teach me the way in which a man of spirit may obtain his pardon; I will come and ask mine at eleven o'clock this evening.

To delay it a single day would be, in my eyes, now, to commit a fresh offence——He whom you have rendered the happiest of men,

DE WARDES.

This note was in the first place a forgery; it was likewise an indelicacy; it was even, according to our present manners, something like an infamous action; but at that period people were not so scrupulous. Besides, d'Artagnan, from her own admission, knew My Lady to be treacherous in matters of more importance, and could entertain no respect for her. And yet, notwithstanding this want of respect, he felt an uncontrollable passion for this woman boiling in his veins. Passion mixed with contempt; but passion or lust, as the reader pleases.

D'Artagnan's plan was very simple; by Kitty's chamber he gained her mistress's; he would take advantage of the first moment of surprise, shame, and terror; he might fail, but something must be left to chance. In a week the campaign was to open, and he would be compelled to leave Paris: d'Artagnan had no time for a prolonged love siege.

"There," said the young man, handing Kitty the letter, sealed and addressed, "give that to My Lady; it is the Count de Wardes's reply."

Poor Kitty became as pale as death; she suspected what the letter contained.

"Listen, my dear girl," said d'Artagnan; "you cannot but perceive that all this must end, some way or other; My Lady may discover that you gave the first billet to my lackey instead of to De Wardes's; that it is I who have opened the others which ought to have been opened by him; My Lady will then turn you out of doors, and you know she is not the woman to let her vengeance stop there."

"Alas!" said Kitty, "for whom have I exposed myself to all that?"

"For me, I well know, my sweet girl," said d'Artagnan. "But I am grateful."

"But what does this note contain?"

"My Lady will tell you."

"Ah! you do not love me," cried Kitty, "and I am very wretched!"

In spite of the caresses with which d'Artagnan endeavored to console her, Kitty wept for some time before she could be persuaded to give her mistress the note; but she yielded at last.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE EQUIPMENT OF ARAMIS AND PORTHOS.

SINCE the four friends had been in search of their equipments, there had been no fixed meeting. They dined without each other, wherever they might happen to be, or rather, where they could find a dinner. Duty, likewise, on its part, took up a considerable portion of that precious time which was gliding away so rapidly. Only they had agreed to meet once a week, about one o'clock, at the residence of Athos, seeing that he, in agreement with the vow he had formed, did not pass over the threshold of his door.

This was the same day as that on which Kitty went to d'Artagnan.

Soon as Kitty left him d'Artagnan directed his steps towards the Rue Ferou.

He found Athos and Aramis philosophizing. Aramis had some slight inclination to resume the cassock. Athos, according to his system, neither encouraged nor dissuaded him. Athos was an advocate that every one should be left to his own free will. He never gave advice but when it was asked; and even then he required to be asked twice.

"People in general," he said, "only asked advice not to follow it; or if they did follow it, it was for the sake of having some one to blame for having given it."

Porthos arrived a minute after d'Artagnan, and the four friends were all assembled.

The four countenances expressed four different feelings: that of Porthos, tranquillity; that of d'Artagnan, hope; that of Aramis, uneasiness; that of Athos, carelessness.

At the end of a moment's conversation, in which Porthos hinted that a lady of elevated rank had condescended to relieve him from his embarrassment, Mousqueton entered. He came to request his master to come home instantly; his presence was very urgent.

"Is it my equipment?"

"Yes, and no," replied Mousqueton.

"Well, but can't you speak?"

"Come home, master."

Porthos rose, saluted his friends, and followed Mousqueton.

An instant after, Bazin made his appearance at the door.

"What do you want with me, my friend?" said Aramis, with that mildness of language which was observable in him every time that his ideas were directed towards the Church.

"A man wishes to see master at home," replied Bazin. "A mendicant."

"Give him alms, Bazin, and bid him pray for a poor sinner."

"But this mendicant insists upon speaking to you, and pretends that you will be very glad to see him."

"Has he sent no particular message for me?"

"Yes. 'If M. Aramis hesitates to come,' he said, 'tell him I am from Tours.'"

"From Tours!" exclaimed Aramis; "a thousand pardons, gentlemen, but no doubt this man brings me the news I expected."

And rising, he went off at a quick pace.

There then only remained Athos and d'Artagnan.

"I believe these fellows have managed their business. What do you think, d'Artagnan?" said Athos.

"I know that Porthos was in a fair way," replied d'Artagnan; "and as to Aramis, to tell you the truth, I have never been uneasy on his account; but you, my dear Athos, who so generously distributed the Englishman's pistoles, your legitimate property, what do you mean to do?"

"I am satisfied with having killed that man, my good lad, seeing that it is proper to kill an Englishman; but if I had pocketed his coin, they would have weighed me down like remorse."

"Athos! you have truly inconceivable ideas!"

"Well, leave that!—What do you think of Captain Treville's telling me, when he did me the honor to call upon me yesterday, that you associated with the suspected English, whom the Cardinal protects?"

"That is to say, I visit an Englishwoman; the one I named to you."

"Oh! ay! the fair lady on whose account I gave you advice, which, naturally, you took care not to adopt."

"I gave you my reasons."

"Yes; you look to the connection for your equipment, I think you said."

"Not at all! I have acquired a certain knowledge that this woman was concerned in the carrying off of Mme. Bonacieux."

"Yes, I understand now; to find one woman, you make love to another: it is the longest road, but certainly the most amusing."

D'Artagnan was on the point of telling Athos all; but one consideration restrained him. Athos was a gentleman, and was punctilious in all that concerned honor, and there were in all the plans which our lover had devised with regard to My Lady, he was sure, certain moves that would not obtain his approbation; he was therefore silent, and as Athos was the least curious of any man on earth, d'Artagnan's confidence stopped there.

We will therefore leave the two friends, who had nothing important to communicate to each other, to follow Aramis.

Upon being informed that the person who wanted to speak to

him came from Tours, we have seen with what rapidity the young man followed, or rather went before, Bazin; he ran without stopping from the Rue Ferou to Rue de Vaugirard.

On entering, he found a man of short stature and intelligent eyes, but covered with rags.

"Did you ask for me?" said the Musketeer.

"I wish to speak with M. Aramis: is that your name?"

"Yes: you have brought me something?"

"Yes, if you can show me a certain embroidered handkerchief."

"Here it is," cried Aramis, taking a small key from his breast and opening a little ebony box inlaid with mother-of-pearls, "here it is—look!"

"That is right," replied the mendicant; "dismiss your lackey."

In fact, Bazin, curious to know what a beggar could want with his master, kept pace with him as well as he could, and arrived almost at the same time he did; but this quickness was not of much use to him; at the hint from the mendicant, his master made him a sign to retire, and he was obliged to obey.

Bazin being gone, the mendicant cast a rapid glance around him in order to be sure that nobody could either see or hear him, and opening his ragged vest, badly held together by a leather strap, he began to unsew the upper part of his doublet, from which he drew a letter.

Aramis uttered a cry of joy at the sight of the seal, kissed the superscription with an almost religious respect, and opened the epistle, which contained what follows:

"My Friend—It is the will of fate that we should be still for some time separated; but the delightful days of youth are not lost beyond return. Perform your duty in camp; I will do mine elsewhere. Accept that which the bearer brings you; make the campaign like a handsome, true gentleman, and think of me, who tenderly kisses your dear black eyes!

"Farewell! or rather, may we meet again!"

The mendicant continued to unsew his garments, and drew from amidst his rags a hundred and fifty Spanish double pistoles, which he laid down on the table; then he opened the door, bowed, and went out before the young man, stupefied by his letter, had ventured to address a word to him.

Aramis then re-perused the letter, and perceived there was a postscript:

"P. S. You may behave politely to the bearer, who is a count and a grandee of Spain."

"Golden dreams!" cried Aramis. "Oh, beautiful life! yes, we are young—yes, we shall yet have happy days! Oh! my love, my blood, my life! all, all, all, all are thine, my adored mistress!"

And he kissed the letter with passion, without even vouchsafing a look at the gold which sparkled on the table.

Bazin scratched at the door, and as Aramis had no longer any reason to exclude him, he bade him come in.

Bazin was stupefied at the sight of the gold, and forgot that he came to announce d'Artagnan, who, curious to know who the beggar could be, came to Aramis's residence on leaving Athos's.

Now, as d'Artagnan used no ceremony with Aramis, seeing that Bazin forgot to announce him, he announced himself.

"The devil! my dear Aramis," said d'Artagnan, "if these are the prunes that are sent to you from Tours, I beg you will make my compliments to the gardener who gathers them."

"You are mistaken, friend," said Aramis, always on his guard, "this is from my publisher, who has just sent me the price of that poem in one-syllable verse which I began yonder."

"Ah! indeed," said d'Artagnan, "well, your bookseller is very generous, that's all I can say."

"How, master?" cried Bazin, "a poem sell so dear as that! it is incredible! You can write as much as you like, you may become equal to M. Voiture and M. Benserade. I like that. A poet is as good as an abbe. Ah, Monsieur Aramis! become a poet, I beg of you."

"Bazin, my man," said Aramis, "I believe you are interfering with my conversation." Bazin perceived he was wrong; he bowed and went out.

"Ah!" said d'Artagnan, with a smile, "you sell your productions at their weight in gold; you are very fortunate my friend, but take care, or else you will lose that letter which is peeping out from your doublet, and which comes, no doubt, from your bookseller likewise."

Aramis blushed to the eyes, crammed in the letter, and rebuttoned his doublet.

"My dear d'Artagnan," said he, "if you please, we will join our friends; as I am rich, we will to-day begin to dine together again, expecting that you will be rich in your turn."

"Faith!" said d'Artagnan, with great pleasure, "it is long since we have had a good dinner together; and I, for my part, have a somewhat hazardous expedition for this evening, and shall not be sorry, I confess, to fortify myself with a few glasses of good old Burgundy."

"Agreed, as to the old Burgundy; I have no objection to that," said Aramis, from whom the letter and the gold had removed, as by magic, his ideas of retirement from the world.

And having put two or three double pistoles into his pocket to answer the calls of the moment, he placed the others in the ebony box inlaid with mother-of-pearl, in which was the famous handkerchief which served him as a talisman.

The two friends repaired to Athos's dwelling; and he, faithful to his vow of not going out, took upon him to order dinner to be brought to them; as he was perfectly acquainted with the details of gastronomy, d'Artagnan and Aramis made no difficulty in abandoning this important care to him.

They went to find Porthos, and at the corner of the Rue Bac

met Mousqueton, who, with a most pitiable air, was driving before him a mule and a horse.

D'Artagnan uttered an exclamation of surprise, which was not quite free from joy.

"There's my yellow horse, Aramis," cried he; "look at that horse!"

"Oh, the frightful brute!" said Aramis.

"Well," replied d'Artagnan, "upon that very horse I came to Paris."

"What, does master know this horse?" said Mousqueton.

"It is of a singular color," said Aramis; "I never saw one with such a hide in my life."

"I can well believe you did not," replied d'Artagnan, "and that was how I got three crowns for him; it must have been for his hide, for, certes, the carcass is not worth eighteen livres. But how did this horse come into your hands, Mousqueton?"

"Pray," said the lackey, "say nothing about it, master; it is a frightful trick played us by the husband of our Duchess!"

"How has it come about, Mousqueton?"

"Why, we are looked upon with a rather favorable eye by a lady of quality, the Duchess of ——; but, your pardon; my master has commanded me to be discreet; she had forced us to accept, as a little keepsake, a magnificent Spanish genet and an Andalusian mule, which were beautiful to look upon; the husband heard of the affair; on their way he seized the two magnificent beasts which were being sent to us, and substituted these horrible animals in their places."

"Which you are taking back to him, I suppose?" said d'Artagnan.

"Exactly so, master!" replied Mousqueton; "you may well believe that we will not accept such steeds as these in exchange for those promised to us."

"No, indeed, though I should like to have seen Porthos upon my yellow horse; that would give me an idea of how I looked on my arrival in Paris. But don't let us hinder you, Mousqueton; go, and perform your master's orders. Is he at home?"

"Yes, master," said Mousqueton, "but in a very ill humor. Go on!" and he continued his way, while the two friends went to ring at the bell of the unfortunate Porthos in vain.

In the meanwhile, Mousqueton continued on his way, and, still driving the two sorry animals before him, he reached the Rue aux Ours. When arrived there, he fastened, according to the orders of his master, both the horse and mule to the knocker of the proctor's door; then, without taking any heed of their future fate, he returned to Porthos, and told him that his errand was completed.

In a short time the two unfortunate beasts, who had not eaten anything since morning, made such a noise with the knocker that the proctor ordered his boy-clerk to go and inquire in the neighborhood to whom this horse and mule belonged.

Madame Coquenard recognized her presents, and could not at

first comprehend this restitution; but the visit of Porthos soon enlightened her. The anger which fired the eyes of the Musketeer, in spite of his efforts to suppress it, terrified his sensitive idol. In fact, Mousqueton had not concealed from his master that he had met d'Artagnan and Aramis, and that d'Artagnan, in the yellow horse, had recognized the Bearnais pony upon which he had come to Paris, and which he had sold for three crowns.

Porthos went away after having appointed a meeting with the dame in the cloisters of St. Magloire.

Madame Coquenard repaired trembling to the cloisters, for she guessed the reproaches that awaited her there; but she was fascinated by the lofty airs of Porthos.

All that which a man, wounded in his self-love, could let fall in the shape of imprecations and reproaches upon the head of a woman Porthos let fall upon her bowed head.

"Alas!" said she, "I did all for the best. One of our clients is a horsedealer; he owes money to the office, and was backward in his pay. I took the mule and the horse for what he owed us; he assured me that they were two noble steeds."

"Well, madame," said Porthos, "if he owed you more than five crowns, your horsedealer is a thief."

"M. Porthos, I am ignorant of all such matters. How should I know what a horse is? How should I know what horse-furniture is?"

"You should have left it to me, then, madam, who does know what they are: but you would be parsimonious, and consequently, lend at usury."

"I have done wrong, M. Porthos, but I will repair that wrong —upon my word of honor I will."

"And how will you do that?" asked the Musketeer.

"Listen to me. This evening M. Coquenard is going to the house of the Duke de Chaulnes, who has sent for him. It is upon a consultation, which will last three hours at least; come, we shall be alone, and can make up our accounts."

"Ah! now that is speaking to the purpose, my dear!"

"You pardon me, then?"

"We shall see," said Porthos, majestically.

And they separated, both saying "Till this evening."

"The devil!" thought Porthos, as he walked away, "it appears I am getting nearer to old Coquenard's safe at last."

CHAPTER XXXIV.

A FAIR EXCHANGE IN LOVERS IS NO ROBBERY.

THE night so eagerly looked forward to by both Porthos and d'Artagnan arrived. The latter called as usual about nine o'clock on My Lady, whom he found in a delightful mood, and never had he been more pleasantly welcomed. He saw at the first glance

that his note had come to hand and executed its expected effect.

Kitty brought in sherbet. Her mistress treated her kindly, and smiled on her most graciously, but the poor girl was so wretched that she did not notice it. Gazing on one and the other, the gallant was compelled to own that nature had made a mistake in forming them, as the fine lady had a vile and venal soul and the waiting-maid had the heart of a princess.

At ten o'clock My Lady began to be uneasy. One could plainly see what was the matter. She arose, walked about, sat down again, her eyes seeming constantly to reproach the sluggish progress of the pendulum. At length, as the time drew near, there was no mistaking her; her looks said, distinctly as words, You have been very agreeable, but it is quite time you were gone. He arose, took his hat, bowed over her hand, even ventured to kiss it, all which she not only allowed, but he was astonished to find her beautiful fingers return the respectful pressure.

And yet, though the fascination still continued, she was not for a moment deceived; there was no partiality for him, not even coquetry in it.

"She must love him devilishly," thought he, in going out.

But poor little Kitty could not find it in her heart to come down to meet him; he was obliged to grope his way up the back staircase alone.

On reaching the soubrette's little apartment, he found her seated with her head resting on her hands, weeping bitterly. My Lady, in the delirium of her joy, had revealed to her the contents of the supposed De Wardes's billet.

D'Artagnan's heart smote him more than he liked to own, but his plan lay too much at heart; the only honest thing he could do towards Kitty was to give her clearly to understand that he could not draw back, but must go on; only adding, as a sedative, that he was now actuated solely by revenge.

From some little remains of modesty, My Lady had ordered all the lights to be extinguished, even in her own chamber, and M. de Wardes was to depart before day, in darkness.

The Gascon had not been many minutes with Kitty before he heard My Lady enter her chamber, and he quickly ensconced himself in his closet; indeed, Kitty had scarcely pushed him in, when her mistress's little bell rang. Kitty replied to the summons, taking care to shut the door after her, but the wainscot was so thin one could hear almost all both the women said.

A few minutes before the appointed hour, My Lady had all the lights put out in her chamber, and dismissed Kitty to hers, with an injunction to introduce the count the moment he arrived.

He did not keep Kitty waiting long.

Seeing through a chink of his hiding-place that all was darkness, he was at the door of My Lady's chamber before Kitty had closed it.

"What is that noise?" said My Lady.

"It is I, De Wardes," replied he in a suppressed voice.

"Well, why do you not come in?" said My Lady, tremulously.

Shaking off poor Kitty with as much kindness as he could, d'Artagnan made his way into My Lady's chamber.

"Yes, count," said the lady in her sweetest voice, while squeezing his hand in hers, "I am happy in the love which your words and looks have expressed every time you came. I love you, too. I only wish that I should have some keepsake of you to-morrow, and, meanwhile, here is a reminder." She slipped a ring from her finger upon the guardsman's, who recalled it as a magnificent sapphire, set in brilliants. His impulse was to reject it, but she bade him keep it for her love's sake. "You will render me likewise a greater service than you are aware of by doing so,"—and her voice was agitated. At that moment he felt ready to reveal everything, but she added:

"Poor dear angel! whom that monster of a Gascon was so near killing. Do you suffer much from your wounds?" continued she.

"Yes, a great deal," said he, scarcely knowing what to answer.

"Be satisfied," murmured she; "I will avenge you, and cruelly."

"Pest!" thought d'Artagnan; "the time for confidence has not yet come."

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"Your My Lady is doubtless an infamous creature. But since you mentioned it, my attention has been engrossed by your ring," said Athos.

"I saw you were looking at it; it is handsome, is it not?" said d'Artagnan.

"Yes," said Athos, "magnificent. It reminds me of a family jewel, which had one of its faces scratched."

D'Artagnan took off the ring, giving it again to Athos.

Athos started. "Look!" said he, "is it not strange?" and he pointed out to d'Artagnan the scratch he had remembered.

"But from whom did this ring come to you, Athos?"

"From my mother, who inherited it from her mother—an old family jewel."

"And you—sold it?" asked d'Artagnan hesitatingly.

"No," replied Athos, with a singular smile; "I gave it away in a love-affair, as it has been given to you."

D'Artagnan became pensive in his turn; it appeared as if there were abysses in My Lady's soul whose depths were dark and unknown. He took back the ring, but put it into his pocket, and not on his finger.

"D'Artagnan," said Athos, taking his hand, "you know I love you; if I had a son, I could not love him better. Take my advice, renounce this woman. A lost soul with something deadly about her."

"You are right," said d'Artagnan. "I have done with her; she terrifies me."

"Shall you have the courage?" said Athos.

"I shall," replied d'Artagnan, "and instantly."

"In truth, my young friend, you will act rightly, and God

grant that this woman, who has scarcely entered into your life, may not leave a terrible trace in it!"

And he bowed to d'Artagnan, like a man who wishes to be left alone with his thoughts.

On reaching home, d'Artagnan found Kitty waiting for him.

She was sent by her mistress to the false De Wardes. Her mistress was mad with love; she wished to know when her lover would meet her again. And poor Kitty, pale and trembling, awaited d'Artagnan's reply. The counsels of his friend, joined to the cries of his own heart, made him determine, now his pride was saved and his vengeance satisfied, not to see My Lady again. As a reply, he wrote the following letter:

Do not depend upon me, madame, for the next meeting; since my convalescence I have so many affairs of this kind on my hands, that I am forced to regulate them a little. When your turn comes, I shall have the honor to inform you of it. I kiss your hands. DE WARDES.

Not a word about the ring. D'Artagnan gave the open letter to Kitty, who at first was unable to comprehend it, but who became almost wild with joy on reading it a second time. She could scarcely believe in her happiness; and whatever might be, considering the violent character of My Lady, the danger which the poor girl incurred in giving this billet to her mistress, she ran back as fast as her legs would carry her.

My Lady opened the letter with eagerness; but at the first words she read she became livid; she crushed the paper in her hand, and turning with flashing eyes upon Kitty, screamed:

"What is this letter?"

"The answer to yours," replied Kitty, all in a tremble.

"Impossible!" cried My Lady; "it is impossible a gentleman could have written such a letter to a lady." Then all at once, starting, she added: "Can he have—" and she stopped. She ground her teeth; she was of the color of ashes. She endeavored to go towards the window for air, but she could only stretch forth her arms, her legs failed her, and she sank into a chair. Kitty, fearing she was going to faint, hastened towards her, and was beginning to open her dress; but My Lady started up, pushing her away.

"What do you want with me?" said she; "and why do you place your hand on me?"

"I thought you were going to faint, My Lady," answered the terrified girl.

"I faint! I! I! do you take me for a weak, silly woman, then? When I am insulted I do not faint—I avenge myself!"

And she waved Kitty to leave the room.

CHAPTER XXXV.

DREAM OF VENGEANCE.

That evening My Lady gave orders that when M. d'Artagnan came as usual, he should be immediately admitted. But he did not come.

The next day Kitty went to see the young man again, and related to him all that had passed on the preceding evening; d'Artagnan smiled; this jealous anger was his revenge.

That evening My Lady was still more impatient than on the preceding one; she renewed the order relative to the Gascon; but, as before, she expected him in vain.

The next morning, when Kitty presented herself at d'Artagnan's residence, she was no longer joyous and alert, as on the two preceding days, but sad as possible.

D'Artagnan asked what was the matter with her, but she, as her only reply, drew a letter from her pocket and gave it to him.

This letter was in My Lady's handwriting, only this time it was addressed to M. d'Artagnan, and not to M. de Wardes.

He opened it, and read as follows:

Dear M. d'Artagnan—It is wrong thus to neglect your friends, particularly at the moment you are about to leave them for so long a time. My brother-in-law and myself expected you yesterday and the day before, but in vain. Will it be the same this evening? Your very grateful

Lady Clarke.

"That's all very simple," said d'Artagnan; "I expected this letter. My credit rises by the fall of the Count de Wardes."

"And will you go?" asked Kitty.

D'Artagnan promised to remain insensible to the seductions of My Lady, but desired Kitty to tell her mistress that he could not be more grateful for her kindnesses than he was, and that he would be obedient to her orders: but he did not dare to write, for fear of not being able, to such experienced eyes as My Lady's, to disguise his writing sufficiently.

As nine o'clock struck, d'Artagnan was at the Place Royale.

"Show him in," said My Lady, in a quick tone, but so piercing that d'Artagnan heard her.

He was introduced.

D'Artagnan cast an inquiring glance at My Lady. She was pale, and her eyes looked red, either from tears or want of sleep. The number of lights had been intentionally diminished, but the woman could not conceal the traces of the fever which had devoured her during the last two days.

D'Artagnan approached her with his usual gallantry. She then made an extraordinary effort to receive him, but never did a more distressed countenance give the lie to a more amiable smile.

To the questions which d'Artagnan put concerning her health,—

"Ill!" replied she, "very ill! but your agreeable company will divert me."

"Oh! ho!" thought d'Artagnan. "She has never been so kind before. I must be on my guard."

My Lady assumed the most agreeable air possible, and conversed with more than her usual brilliancy. At the same time the fever, which for an instant abandoned her, returned to give lustre to her eyes, color to her cheeks, and vermilion to her lips. D'Artagnan was again in the presence of the Circe who had before surrounded him with her enchantments. His love, which he believed to be extinct, but which was only asleep, awoke again in his heart. My Lady smiled, and d'Artagnan felt that he could damn himself for that smile. There was a moment at which he felt something like remorse.

By degrees, she became more communicative.

"Well, now, let us see what you would do to prove this love of which you speak."

"All that could be required of me. Order—I am ready."

The lady remained thoughtful and undecided for a moment; then, as if appearing to have formed a resolution,—

"I have an enemy," said she, "who has insulted me so cruelly that between him and me it is war to the death. May I reckon on you as an auxiliary?"

D'Artagnan at once perceived what the vindictive creature was coming to.

"You may, madame," said he, with emphasis. "My arm and my life are yours, as my love is. Only name the base man that has brought tears into your beautiful eyes!"

"Such women as I am don't weep," said My Lady.

"So much the better! Come, tell me what his name is."

"You know him."

"It is surely not one of my friends?" replied d'Artagnan, affecting hesitation, in order to make her believe him ignorant.

"If it were, you would hesitate?" cried My Lady; and a threatening glance darted from her eyes.

"Not if it were my own brother!" cried d'Artagnan, as if carried away by his enthusiasm.

Our Gascon advanced this without risk, for he knew who was meant.

"I love your devotedness," said My Lady.

"You love me! you!" cried he. "Oh! if that were so, I should lose my reason!"

And he folded her in his arms. She made no effort to remove her lips from his kisses, only she did not respond to them.

Her lips were cold; it appeared to d'Artagnan that he had embraced a statue.

He was not the less intoxicated with joy, electrified by love; he almost believed in the tenderness of My Lady; he almost believed in the crime of De Wardes. If De Wardes had at that moment been under his hand, he would have killed him.

My Lady seized the desired moment.

"His name is—" said she, in her turn.

"De Wardes; I know it," cried d'Artagnan.

"And how do you know it?" asked the lady, seizing both his hands, and endeavoring to read with her eyes to the bottom of his heart.

D'Artagnan felt he had allowed himself to be carried away, and that he had committed an error.

"I know it because yesterday De Wardes, in a room where I was, showed a ring which he said he had of you."

"Miserable scoundrel!" cried My Lady.

The epithet, as may be easily understood, resounded to the very bottom of the heart of d'Artagnan.

"Well?" continued she.

"Well, I will avenge you of this 'miserable scoundrel,'" replied d'Artagnan, giving himself the airs of Don Japhet of Armenia.

"To-morrow," said he, "you will be avenged, or I shall be dead!"

"No!" said she, "you will avenge me; but you will not be dead. He is a contemptible fellow."

"Towards women he may be, but not towards men. But would it be just to allow me to go to a possible death without having given me at least something more than hope?"

"Are you afraid, dear d'Artagnan?"

"You cannot think me so, dear love!" replied d'Artagnan; "but now, suppose this poor Count de Wardes should be less guilty than you imagine him to be?"

"At all events," said My Lady seriously, "he has deceived me, and from the moment he deceived me he merited death."

"He shall die, then, since you condemn him!" said d'Artagnan, in so firm a tone that it appeared the expression of a devotedness superior to every trial.

This reassured her.

When the faint light of dawn peeped through the blinds, My Lady warned d'Artagnan that it was time to depart, not forgetting to remind him of his promise to avenge her on the Count de Wardes.

"I am quite ready," said d'Artagnan; "but, in the first place, I should like to be certain of one thing."

"And what is that?" asked My Lady.

"That is, whether you really love me?"

"You have little reason to ask such a question, I think."

"Well, perhaps you do, and I am yours, body and soul!"

"Thanks, my brave lover; but as you are satisfied of my love, you must, in your turn, satisfy me of yours. Is not that just?"

"Certainly; but if you love me as much as you say," replied d'Artagnan, "do you not entertain a little fear on my account?"

"Really," said she, "I believe you now begin to hesitate."

"No, I do not hesitate; but I really pity this poor Count de Wardes, since you have ceased to love him. I think that a man must be so severely punished by the loss of your love that he stands in need of no other chastisement."

"Who told you that I have loved him?" asked My Lady sharply.

"At least, I am now at liberty to believe, without too much conceit, that you love another," said the young man, in a caressing tone, "and I repeat that I am really interested for the count, because I alone know that he is far from being, or rather having been, so guilty towards you as he appears to be."

"Indeed!" said My Lady.

"De Wardes cannot boast of anything—"

"That ring—"

"That ring *I* have! The Count de Wardes of last Thursday and the d'Artagnan of to-day are the same person!"

The imprudent young man expected a surprise, mixed with shame—a slight storm, which would resolve itself into tears; but he was strangely deceived, and his error was of not long duration.

Pale and trembling, the lady repulsed d'Artagnan's attempted embrace by a violent blow on the chest, as she sprung from him.

It was then broad daylight.

To sue for forgiveness, the lover caught her by the fine muslin wrapper, but her powerful and determined movement was still in flight. The tissue tore so as to leave her lovely round and white shoulders nude, and the other, with inexpressible emotion, beheld on one of them the royal brand—the broad arrow or lily flower—the indelible stigma which the shameful hand of the public executioner inflicts.

"Great God!" cried d'Artagnan, loosing his hold and remaining mute, motionless, and frozen.

But the lady felt herself denounced by his terror, even. He had doubtless seen all. The young man now knew her secret, her terrible secret—of which all the world, excepting he, was ignorant.

She turned upon him, no longer like a furious woman, but like a wounded panther.

"Ah, wretch!" cried she, "thou hast basely betrayed me! and still more, thou hast my secret! Thou shalt die!"

And she flew to a little inlaid casket which stood upon the toilet, opened it with a feverish and trembling hand, drew from it a small poniard with a golden haft and a sharp thin blade, and then threw herself with a bound upon d'Artagnan.

Although the young man was, as we know, brave, he was terrified at that wild countenance—terribly dilated pupils, pale cheeks, and bleeding lips. He drew back to the other side of the room as he would have done from a serpent crawling towards him, and his sword coming in contact with his nervous hand, he drew it, almost unconsciously, from the scabbard.

But, without taking any heed of the sword, My Lady endeavored to get near enough to him to stab him, and did not stop till she felt the sharp point at her throat.

She then endeavored to seize the sword with her hands, but d'Artagnan kept it free from her grasp, and continued to present

the point, sometimes at her eyes, sometimes at her breast, whilst he aimed at making his retreat by the door which led to Kitty's apartment.

The lady during this time continued to strike at him with her dagger with horrible fury, screaming in a superhuman manner.

As all this, however, bore some resemblance to a duel, d'Artagnan soon began to recover himself.

"Very well, pretty lady—very well," said he; "but, if you don't calm yourself, I will mark you with a second fleur-de-lis upon one of those pretty cheeks!"

"Scoundrel! infamous scoundrel!" howled My Lady.

But d'Artagnan, still keeping on the defensive, drew near to Kitty's door. At the noise they made, she in overturning the furniture in her efforts to get at him, he in screening himself behind the furniture to keep out of her reach, Kitty, in great alarm, opened the door. D'Artagnan, who had constantly manœuvred to gain this point, was not at more than three paces from it. With one spring he flew from the chamber of My Lady into that of the maid, and, quick as lightning, he slammed to the door, and placed all his weight against it, whilst Kitty bolted it.

Then My Lady attempted to tear down the door-case, with a strength apparently above a woman's; but finding she could not accomplish this, she, in her fury, stabbed at the door with her poniard, the point of which repeatedly glittered through the wood. Every blow was accompanied with terrible imprecations.

"Quick, Kitty, quick!" said d'Artagnan, in a low voice, as soon as the bolts were fast, "let me get out of the hotel; it's life and death!"

It was time; My Lady had already rung her bell and roused the whole hotel; the porter was drawing the door to at the moment My Lady cried from her window:

"Don't open the gate! don't open!"

The young man sprang out whilst she was still threatening him with an impotent gesture. At the moment she lost sight of him My Lady sank back fainting into her chamber.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

HOW ATHOS FOUND HIS EQUIPMENT.

D'ARTAGNAN was so completely bewildered that, without taking any heed of what would become of Kitty, he ran at full speed across half Paris, and did not stop till he came to Athos's door. The confusion of his mind, the terror which spurred him on, the cries of some of the patrol who started in pursuit of him, and the shouting of the people, who, notwithstanding the early hour, were going to their work, only made him precipitate his course.

He crossed the court, ran up the two flights to Athos's apartments, and knocked at the door enough to break it down.

Grimaud came, rubbing his half-open eyes, to answer this noisy summons, and d'Artagnan sprang with such violence into the room as nearly to overturn the astonished lackey.

In spite of his habitual dumbness, the poor lad this time found his speech.

"Hallo, there!" cried he; "what do you want, you strumpet? What's your business here, you hussy?"

"Grimaud," said Athos, coming out of his apartment. "I thought I heard you permitting yourself to speak?"

"Ah, master, but—"

"Silence!"

Grimaud contented himself with pointing d'Artagnan out to his master with his finger.

Athos recognized his comrade, and, phlegmatic as he was, he burst into a laugh that was quite excused by the masquerade before his eyes: petticoats falling over his shoes, sleeves tucked up, and mustaches stiff with agitation.

"Don't laugh, my friend!" cried d'Artagnan; "for heaven's sake, don't laugh, for, upon my soul, it's no laughing matter!"

And he pronounced these words with such a solemn air and with such a real appearance of terror, that Athos eagerly seized his hand, crying:

"Are you wounded, my friend? How pale you are!"

"No, but I have just met with a terrible adventure!"

"Prepare yourself to hear an incredible and unheard-of history. My Lady is marked with a fleur-de-lis upon her shoulder!"

"Ah!" cried the Musketeer, as if he had received a ball in his heart.

"Are you sure," said d'Artagnan—"are you *sure* that the *other* is dead?"

"*The other?*" said Athos, in so inward a voice that d'Artagnan scarcely heard him.

"Yes; she of whom you told me one day at Amiens."

Athos uttered a groan, and let his head sink into his hands.

"But you say she is an Englishwoman?"

"She is called My Lady, but, notwithstanding that, she may be a Frenchwoman. Lord Winter is only her brother-in-law."

"I will see her, d'Artagnan!"

"Beware, Athos—beware; you endeavored to kill her; she is a woman to return you the like, and not to fail, I promise you. Ah! my dear Athos, I am greatly afraid I have drawn a terrible vengeance on both of us!"

D'Artagnan then related all: the mad passion of My Lady and her menaces of death to him.

"You are right, and upon my soul, I would give my life for a hair," said Athos. "Fortunately, the day after to-morrow we leave Paris. We are going, according to all probability, to La Rochelle, and once gone—"

"She will follow you to the end of the world, Athos, if she

recognizes you; let her, then, exhaust her vengeance on me alone!"

"My dear friend! of what consequence is it if she kills me?" said Athos; "do you, perchance, think I set any great store by life?"

"There is something horribly mysterious under all this, Athos; this woman is one of the Cardinal's spies, I am sure of that."

"In that case take care of yourself. If the Cardinal does not hold you in high admiration for the affair of London, he entertains a great hatred for you; but as, considering everything, he cannot accuse you openly, and as hatred must be satisfied, particularly when it's a cardinal's hatred, take care of yourself! If you go out, do not go out alone; when you eat, use every precaution; mistrust, in short, everything, even your own shadow."

"Fortunately," said d'Artagnan, "all this will be only necessary till after to-morrow evening, for, when once with the army, we shall have, I hope, only men to dread."

"In the meantime," said Athos, "I renounce my plan of seclusion, and wherever you go, I will go with you; you must return to the Rue des Fossoyeurs; I will accompany you."

"Yes, but however near it may be, I cannot go thither in this guise."

"That's true," said Athos, and he rang the bell.

Grimaud entered.

Athos made him a sign to go to d'Artagnan's residence and bring back some clothes. Grimaud replied by a nod that he understood perfectly, and set off.

"All this will not advance your equipment," said Athos, "for if I am not mistaken, you have left the best of your apparel at My Lady's, and she will certainly not have the politeness to return it you. Fortunately, you have the sapphire."

"The sapphire is yours, my dear Athos! Did you not tell me it was a family jewel?"

"Yes, my father gave two thousand crowns for it, as he once told me; it formed part of the nuptial present he made my mother; and it is magnificent. My mother gave it to me, and I, fool as I was, instead of keeping the ring as a holy relic, gave it to this wretched woman."

"Then, my friend, take back this ring, to which, it is plain, you attach much value."

"I take back the ring, after it had passed through the hands of that infamous creature! never! that ring is defiled, d'Artagnan."

"Sell it, then."

At this moment Grimaud returned, accompanied by Planchet; the latter, anxious about his master, and curious to know what had happened to him, took advantage of the opportunity, and brought his clothes himself.

D'Artagnan dressed himself, and Athos did the same. When about to go out, the latter made Grimaud the sign of a soldier

taking aim, and the lackey immediately took down his musketoon, and got ready to follow his master.

They arrived without accident at the Rue des Fossoyeurs. Bonacieux was standing at the door; he cast one of his ill-meaning, bantering looks at d'Artagnan as he passed him,—

"Make haste, my dear lodger," said he; "there is a very pretty girl waiting for you upstairs; and, you know, women don't like to be made to wait."

"That's Kitty!" said d'Artagnan to himself and darted into the passage. In fact, upon the landing leading to the chamber, and crouching against the door, he found the poor girl, all in a tremble. As soon as she perceived him, she said:

"You promised to protect me; you promised to save me from her anger; remember, it was you who ruined me!"

"Yes, yes, to be sure, Kitty," said d'Artagnan; "be at ease, my girl. But what happened after my departure?"

"How can I tell?" said Kitty. "The lackeys were brought by the cries she made,—she was mad with passion; there exists no imprecations she did not utter against you. Then I thought she would remember it was through my chamber you had gone in to hers, and that then she would suppose I was your accomplice; so I took what little money I had and the best of my things, and I got away as fast as I could."

"Poor dear girl! luckily I can manage your business for you. Planchet, go and find M. Aramis; request him to come here directly. We have something very importont to say to him."

"I understand," said Athos; "but why not Porthos? I should have thought that his duchess—"

"Oh! Porthos's duchess is dressed by her husband's clerks," said d'Artagnan, laughing. "Besides, Kitty would not like to live in the Rue aux Ours."

"I do not care where I live," said Kitty, "provided I am well concealed, and she does not know where I am."

"And now, Kitty, when we are about to separate, and you are no longer jealous of me—answer me; I attach great importance to the question I am about to put to you. Did you never hear talk of a young woman who was carried off one night?"

"There now!—Oh! do you love her still?"

"No, no, it is one of my friends who loves her—M. Athos; this gentlemen here."

"I?" cried Athos, with an accent like that of a man who perceives he was about to tread upon an adder.

"You, to be sure!" said d'Artagnan, pressing Athos's hand. "You know the interest we both take in this poor little Madame Bonacieux. Besides, Kitty will tell nothing; will you, Kitty? You understand, my dear girl," continued d'Artagnan, "she is the wife of that frightful baboon you saw at the door as you came in."

"Oh! you remind me of my fright! if he should have known me again! He came twice to My Lady's, about fifteen or eighteen days ago, and yesterday evening he came again."

"Yesterday evening?"

"Yes, just before you came."

"My dear Athos, we are enveloped in a network of spies! And do you believe he knew you again, Kitty?'

"I pulled down my hood as soon as I saw him, but perhaps it was too late."

"Go down, Athos, he mistrusts you less than me, and see if he be still at the door."

Athos went down and returned immediately.

"He is gone," said he, "and the house door is shut."

"He is gone to make his report, and to say that the pigeons are at this moment all in the dovecote."

"Well, then, let us all fly away," said Athos, "and leave nobody here but Planchet, to bring us news."

"A minute. But Aramis, whom we have sent for!"

"That's true," said Athos, "we must wait for Aramis."

At that moment Aramis arrived.

The matter was all explained to him, and the friends gave him to understand that among all his high connections he must find a place for Kitty.

"Very well; Madame de Bois-Tracy asked me, for one of her friends who resides in the provinces, I believe, for a trustworthy femme de chambre; and if you can, my dear d'Artagnan, answer for the girl—"

"Oh! be assured that I shall be entirely devoted to the person who will give me the means of quitting Paris."

"Then," said Aramis, "this falls out very well."

He placed himself at the table, and wrote a little note which he sealed with a ring, and gave it to Kitty.

"And now, my dear girl," said d'Artagnan, "you know that it is not good for any of us to be here. Therefore let us separate. We shall meet again in better days, depend upon it."

"Dicers' oaths!" said Athos, whilst d'Artagnan went to conduct Kitty downstairs.

An instant afterwards the three young men separated, agreeing to meet again at four o'clock at Athos's residence, and leaving Planchet to guard the house.

Aramis returned home, and Athos and d'Artagnan went about pledging the sapphire.

The Jew told them that if they would sell it to him, as it would make a magnificent pendant for earrings, he would give five hundred pistoles for it.

"This ring would certainly only recall very bitter remembrances; then we shall never be masters of three hundred pistoles to redeem it; so that we really should lose two hundred pistoles by the bargain. Tell him the ring is his, d'Artagnan."

It was thus Athos found in his family resources which he did not expect.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

A VISION.

At four o'clock the four friends were all assembled at Athos's apartments. Their anxiety about their equipments had all disappeared, and each countenance only preserved the expression of its own secret inquietudes; for behind all present happiness is concealed a fear for the future.

Suddenly Planchet entered, bringing two letters for d'Artagnan,

The one was a little note, genteelly folded, with a pretty seal in green wax, on which was impressed a dove bearing a green branch.

The other was a large square epistle, resplendent with the terrible arms of the Cardinal-Duke.

"Be," said the love-letter, "on Thursday next, at seven o'clock in the evening, on the road to Chaillot, and look carefully into the carriages that pass; but if you have any consideration for your own life or that of those who love you, do not speak a single word, do not make a movement which may lead any one to believe you have recognized her who exposes herself to everything for the sake of seeing you but for an instant."

No signature.

"That's a snare," said Athos; "don't go, d'Artagnan; a pistol-shot is easily fired from a carriage, however fast it may be going."

"Bah!" said d'Artagnan, "they will miss me; if they fire, we will ride after the carriage, and exterminate those who may be in it. They must be enemies."

"He is right," said Porthos; "battle! besides, it will be a good opportunity to try our new arms."

"Let us enjoy that pleasure," said Aramis, in his mild and careless manner.

"As you please," said Athos.

"Gentlemen," said d'Artagnan, "it is half-past four, and we have scarcely time to be on the road of Chaillot by six."

"Besides, if we go out late, nobody will see us," said Porthos, "and that will be a pity. Let us get ready, gentlemen."

"But this second letter," said Athos, "you forget that; it appears to me, however, that the seal denotes that it deserves to be opened; for my part, I declare, d'Artagnan, I think it of much more consequence than the little piece of waste paper you have so cunningly slipped into your bosom."

D'Artagnan blushed.

"Well," said he, "let us see, gentlemen, what are his Eminence's commands," and d'Artagnan unsealed the letter and read:

M. d'Artagnan, of the King's Guards, company Desessarts, is expected at the Palais-Cardinal this evening, at eight o'clock.

La Houdeniere, Captain of the Guards.

"The devil!" said Athos; "here's a rendezvous much more serious than the other."

"I will go to the second after attending the first," said d'Artagnan; "one is for seven o'clock, and the other for eight: there will be time for both."

"Yes, but the Bastile?" said Aramis.

"Bah! you will get me out, if they put me there," said d'Artagnan.

"To be sure we will," replied Aramis and Porthos, with admirable promptness and decision, as if the simplest thing in the world,—"to be sure we will get you out, if there; but in the meantime, as we are to set off the day after to-morrow, you would do much better not to risk this Bastile."

"Let us do better than that," said Athos; "do not let us leave him during the whole evening; let each of us wait at a gate of the palace with a Musketeer behind him; if we see any carriage with closed windows, and of at all suspicious appearance, come out, let us fall upon it: it is a long time since we have had a skirmish with the Cardinal's guards; Treville must think us dead."

"To a certainty, Athos," said Aramis, "you were meant to be a general; what do you think of the plan, gentlemen?"

"Admirable!" replied the young men in chorus.

"Well," said Porthos, "I will run to the hotel, and engage our comrades to hold themselves in readiness by eight o'clock—the rendezvous, the Place du Palais-Cardinal; in the meantime, you see that the lackeys saddle the horses."

"I have no horse," said d'Artagnan, "but that is of no consequence; I can take one of M. de Treville's."

"That is not worth while," said Aramis, "you can have one of mine."

"One of yours! how many have you, then?" asked d'Artagnan.

"Three," replied Aramis, smiling. "The third was brought to me this very morning by a groom out of livery, who would not tell me in whose service he was, and who said he had received orders from his master."

"Or his mistress," interrupted d'Artagnan.

"That makes no difference," said Aramis, coloring; "and who affirmed, as I said, that he had received orders to place the horse in my stable, without informing me whence it came."

"It is only to poets that such things happen," said Athos, gravely.

"Well, in that case we can manage famously," said d'Artagnan.

"The horse you bought will, then, become useless to you?"

"Nearly so."

"Well, let me have it at the price it cost you?"

"Eight hundred livres."

"Here are forty double pistoles, my dear friend," said d'Artagnan, taking the sum from his pocket; "I know that is the coin in which you were paid for your poems."

"You are full of money, then?" said Aramis.

"Money!—rolling in it, my dear fellow!"

And d'Artagnan chinked the remainder of his pistoles in his pocket.

A quarter of an hour afterwards, Porthos appeared at the end of the Rue Ferou, mounted upon a very handsome genet; Mousqueton followed him upon an Auvergne horse, small, but very good-looking: Porthos was resplendent with joy and pride.

At the same time, Aramis made his appearance at the other end of the street upon a superb English charger; Bazin followed him upon a roan, leading a splendid, vigorous Mecklenburg horse; this last was d'Artagnan's.

The two Musketeers met at the gate; Athos and d'Artagnan watched their approach from the window.

"The devil!" cried Aramis, "you have a magnificent horse there, Porthos."

"Yes," replied Porthos, "it is the one that ought to have been sent to me at first; a bad joke of the husband's substituted the other; but the good man has been punished since, and I have obtained full satisfaction."

Grimaud then led up his master's horse; d'Artagnan and Athos came down, got into their saddles, and all four set forward: Athos upon a horse he owed to a woman, Aramis on a horse he owed to his mistress, Porthos on a horse he owed to the proctor's wife, and d'Artagnan on a horse he owed to his good fortune, the best mistress possible.

The lackeys followed.

As Porthos had foreseen, the cavalcade produced a good effect; and if Madame Coquenard had met Porthos, and seen what a superb appearance he made upon his handsome Spanish genet, she would not have regretted the bleeding she had inflicted upon the strong-box of her husband.

Near the Louvre the four friends met with Captain Treville, who was returning from St. Germain; he stopped them to offer his compliments upon their appointments, which in an instant drew round them a hundred gapers.

D'Artagnan took advantage of the circumstance to speak to Treville of the letter with the great red seal and the Cardinal's arms; we beg it to be understood that he did not breathe a word concerning the other.

Treville approved of the resolution he had adopted, and assured him that if on the morrow he did not appear, he himself would undertake to find him, let him be where he might.

At this moment the clock of La Samartine struck six: the four friends pleaded an engagement, and took leave of M. de Treville.

A short gallop brought them to the road of Chaillot; the day began to decline, carriages were passing and repassing; d'Artagnan, keeping at some distance from his friends, darted a scrutinizing glance into every carriage that appeared, but saw no face with which he was acquainted.

At length, after waiting a quarter of an hour, and just as twi-

light was beginning to thicken, a carriage appeared, coming at a quick pace on the road of Sevres; a presentiment instantly told d'Artagnan that this carriage contained the person who had appointed the rendezvous; the young man was himself astonished to find his heart beat so violently. Almost instantly a female head was put out at the window, with two fingers placed upon her mouth, either to enjoin silence or to send him a kiss; d'Artagnan uttered a slight cry of joy: this woman, or rather this apparition, for the carriage passed with the rapidity of a vision, was Madame Bonacieux.

D'Artagnan remained fixed to the spot, astounded, and not knowing what to think.

His three companions joined him. All had plainly seen a woman's head appear out at the window, but none of them, except Athos, knew Madame Bonacieux. The opinion of Athos was that it was she; but less absorbed by that pretty face than d'Artagnan he had fancied he saw a second head, a man's head, in the carriage.

"If that be the case," said d'Artagnan, "they are doubtless transporting her from one prison to another. But what can they intend to do with the poor creature, and how shall I ever meet her again?"

"My friend," said Athos gravely, "remember that it is the dead alone with whom we are not likely to meet again on this earth. You know something of that, as well as I do, I think. Now, if your mistress is not dead, if it is her we have just seen, you will meet with her again some day or other. And perhaps, my God!" added he, with that misanthropic tone which was peculiar to him —"perhaps sooner than you wish."

Half-past seven had struck; the carriage was twenty minutes behind the time appointed. D'Artagnan's friends reminded him that he had a visit to pay, but at the same time calling it to his observation that there was still time to retract.

But d'Artagnan was at the same time impetuous and curious. He had made up his mind that he would go to the Palais-Cardinal, and that he would learn what his Eminence had to say to him; nothing could turn him from his purpose.

They reached the Rue St. Honore, and in the Place du Palais-Cardinal they found the twelve convoked Musketeers, walking about in expectation of their comrades. There only they made them acquainted with the matter in question.

D'Artagnan was well known in the honorable corps in which it had been stated that he was one day to take his place: he was considered, beforehand, as their comrade. It resulted from these antecedents that every one entered heartily into the purpose for which they met; besides, it would not be unlikely that they should have an opportunity of playing either the Cardinal or his people an ill turn, and for such expeditions these worthy gentlemen were always ready.

Athos divided them into three groups, assumed the command of one, gave the second to Aramis, and the third to Porthos, and

then each group went and took a position for watching, near an entrance.

D'Artagnan, on his part, entered boldly at the front gate.

Although he felt himself ably supported, the young man was not without a little uneasiness as he ascended the great staircase step by step. His conduct towards My Lady bore a strong resemblance to treachery, and he was very suspicious of the political relations which existed between that woman and the Cardinal; still further, De Wardes, whom he had treated so ill, was one of the liege-men of his Eminence, and d'Artagnan knew that whilst his Eminence was terrible to his enemies, he was strongly attached to his friends.

"If De Wardes has related all our affair to the Cardinal, which is not to be doubted, and if he has recognized me, which is probable, I may consider myself almost as a condemned man," said d'Artagnan, shaking his head. "But why has he waited till now? Humph! that's all plain enough: My Lady has laid her complaint against me with that hypocritical grief which renders her so interesting, and this last offence has made the cup overflow.

"Fortunately," added he, "my good friends are down yonder, and they will not allow me to be carried away easily. Nevertheless, M. de Treville's company of Musketeers alone cannot maintain a war against the Cardinal, who disposes of the forces of all France, and before whom the Queen is without power and the King without will. D'Artagnan, my friend, you are brave, you are prudent, you have execellent qualities, but the women will ruin you!"

He came to this melancholy conclusion as he entered the antechamber. He placed his letter in the hands of the usher on duty, who led him into the waiting-room, and passed on into the interior of the palace.

In this waiting-room were five or six of the Cardinal's guards, who recognized d'Artagnan, and knowing that it was he who had wounded Jussac, they looked upon him with a smile of singular meaning.

This smile appeared to d'Artagnan to be of bad augury; only, as our Gascon was not easily intimidated, or rather, thanks to a great pride natural to the men of his country, he did not allow himself easily to see that which was passing in his mind, when that which was passing at all resembled fear, he placed himself haughtily in front of messieurs the guards, and waited with his hand on his hip, in an attitude by no means deficient in majesty.

The usher returned and made a sign to d'Artagnan to follow him. It appeared to the young man that the guards, on seeing him depart, whispered among themselves.

He followed a corridor, crossed a grand saloon, entered a library, and found himself in the presence of a man seated at a desk and writing.

The usher introduced him and retired without speaking a word. D'Artagnan remained standing and examined this man.

D'Artagnan at first believed that he had to do with some judge examining his papers, but he perceived that the man of the desk wrote, or rather corrected, lines of unequal length, scanning the words on his fingers; he saw then that he was in face of a poet. At the end of an instant the poet closed his manuscript, upon the cover of which was written, "Mirame, a Tragedy in Five Acts," and raised his head.

D'Artagnan recognized the Cardinal.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

A TERRIBLE VISION.

THE Cardinal leaned his elbow on his manuscript, his cheek upon his hand, and looked intently at the young man for a moment. No one had a more searching eye than the Cardinal de Richelieu, and d'Artagnan felt this glance penetrate his veins like a fever.

He, however, kept a good countenance, and holding his hat in his hand, and awaiting the good pleasure of his Eminence, without too much assurance, but without too much humility.

"Monsieur," said the Cardinal, "are you a d'Artagnan from Bearn?"

"I am the son of him who served in the religious wars under the great King Henry, the father of his gracious Majesty."

"That is well. It is you who set out, seven or eight months ago, from your country to try your fortune in the capital? You came through Meung, where something befell you, I don't very well know what, but still something."

"Monseigneur," said d'Artagnan, "this was what happened to me—"

"Of no consequence!" resumed the Premier, with a smile, which indicated that he knew the story as well as he who wished to relate it; "you were recommended to M. de Treville, were you not?"

"Yes, monseigneur, but in that unfortunate scuffle—"

"The letter was lost," replied his Eminence; "yes, I know that; but M. de Treville is a skilful physiognomist, who knows men at first sight; and he placed you in the company of his brother-in-law, M. Desessarts, leaving you to hope that one day or other you should enter the Musketeers."

"My lord is quite correctly informed," said d'Artagnan.

"Since that time many things have happened to you: you were walking one day behind the Chartreux, when it would have been better for you if you had been elsewhere; then you took with your friends a journey to the waters of Forges; they stopped on the road, but you continued yours. That is all very simple, you had business in England."

"My Lord," said d'Artagnan, quite confused, "I went—"

"Hunting at Windsor, or elsewhere: that concerns nobody.

I am acquainted with the circumstances, because it is my position to know everything. On your return, you were received by an august personage, and I perceive with pleasure that you preserve the souvenir she gave you."

D'Artagnan placed his hand upon the Queen's diamond, which he wore, and quickly turned the bezel inwards; but it was too late.

"The day after that, you received a visit from Cavois," resumed the Cardinal: "he went to desire you to come to the palace; you did not return that visit, and you were wrong."

"I feared I had incurred the anger of your Eminence."

"How could that be, monsieur? Could you incur my anger by having followed the orders of your superiors with more intelligence and courage than another would have done? It is the people who do not obey that I punish, and not those who, like you, obey but too well. As a proof, remember the date of the day on which I caused you to be informed that I desired you to come to me, and seek in your memory for what happened to you that very night."

That was the very evening on which the carrying off of Mme. Bonacieux took place; d'Artagnan trembled; and he likewise recollected that half an hour before the poor woman had passed close to him, without doubt, carried away by the same power that had caused her disappearance.

"In short," continued the Minister, "as I have heard nothing of you for some time past, I wished to know what you were doing; besides, you owe me some thanks; you must yourself have remarked how much you have been considered in all the circumstances."

D'Artagnan bowed with respect.

"That," continued the Cardinal, "arose not only from a feeling of natural equity, but likewise from a plan I have marked out with respect to you."

D'Artagnan became more and more astonished.

"I wished to explain this plan to you on the day you received my first invitation; but you did not come. Fortunately, nothing is lost by this delay, and you are now about to hear it. Sit down, there, before me, M. d'Artagnan; you are quite gentleman enough not to listen standing."

And the Cardinal pointed to a chair for the young man, who was so astonished at what was passing that he awaited a second sign from his interlocutor before he obeyed.

"You are brave, M. d'Artagnan," continued his Eminence; "but you are prudent, which is still better. I like men of head and heart. Don't be afraid," said he, smiling, "by men of heart, I mean men of courage; but young as you are, and scarcely entering into the world, you have powerful enemies; if you do not take great heed, they will destroy you!"

"Alas! monseigneur!" replied the young man, "very easily no doubt; for they are strong and well supported: whilst I am alone!"

"Yes, that's very true; but alone as you are, you have already done much, and will still do more, I don't doubt. And yet you have need, I believe, to be guarded in the adventurous career you have undertaken; for, if I mistake not, you came to Paris with the ambitious idea of making your fortune."

"I am at the age for extravagant hopes, monseigneur," said d'Artagnan.

"There are no extravagant hopes but for fools, monsieur, and you are a man of understanding. Now, what would you say to an ensigncy in my guards, and a company after the campaign?"

"Monseigneur," replied d'Artagnan, with an embarrassed air.

"What! do you decline it?" cried the Cardinal, with astonishment.

"I am in his Majesty's guards, monseigneur, and I have no reason to be dissatisfied."

"But it appears to me that my guards are also his Majesty's guards, and whoever serves in a French corps serves the King."

"Monseigneur, your Eminence has ill understood my words."

"You want a pretext, do you not? I comprehend. Well, you have this excuse. Advancement, the opening campaign, the opportunity which I offer you, so much for the world; as regards yourself, safe protection: for it is fit you should know, M. d'Artagnan, that I have received heavy and serious complaints against you; you do not consecrate your days and nights to the King's service alone."

D'Artagnan colored.

"In fact," said the Cardinal, placing his hand upon a bundle of papers, "I have here a whole pile which concerns you. I know you to be a man of resolution, and your services, well directed, instead of leading you to ill, might be very advantageous to you. Come, reflect, and decide."

"Your goodness confounds me, monseigneur," replied d'Artagnan, "and I am conscious of a greatness of soul in your Eminence that makes me mean as an earth-worm; but since your Lordship permits me to speak freely, I will presume to say, that all my friends are in the King's Musketeers and guards, and, by an inconceivable fatality, all my enemies are in the service of your Eminence; I should, therefore, be ill received here and ill regarded there if I accepted that which monseigneur offers me."

"Do you happen to entertain the proud idea that I have not yet made you an offer equal to your merit?" asked the Cardinal, with a smile of disdain.

"Monseigneur, your Eminence is a hundred times too kind on my account, and, on the contrary, I think I have not proved myself worthy of your goodness. Everything is best in its time, monseigneur; hereafter, perhaps, I shall have the right of giving myself: at present, I shall appear to sell myself."

"That is to say, you refuse to serve me, monsieur," said the Cardinal, with a tone of vexation, through which, however, might be seen a sort of esteem; "remain free, then, and preserve your hatreds and your sympathies."

"Monseigneur—"

"Well! well!" said the Premier, "I don't wish you any ill; but you must be aware that it is quite trouble enough to defend and reward our friends; we owe nothing to our enemies; and let me give you a piece of advice: take good care of yourself, Monsieur d'Artagnan, for, from the moment I withdraw my hand from you, I would not give a snap for your life."

"I will try to do so, monseigneur," replied the Gascon, with a noble confidence.

"Remember at a later period, if any mischance should happen to you," said Richelieu, with earnestness, "that it was I who came to seek you, and that I did all in my power to prevent this misfortune befalling you."

"I shall entertain, whatever may happen," said d'Artagnan, placing his hand upon his breast and bowing, "an eternal gratitude towards your Eminence for that which you now do for me."

"Well, let it be, then, as you have said, M. d'Artagnan; we shall see each other again after the campaign: I will have my eye upon you, for I shall be there," replied the Cardinal, pointing with his finger to a magnificent suit of armor he was to wear, "and on our return, well—we will settle our account!"

"Ah! monseigneur!" cried d'Artagnan, "spare me the weight of your anger, remain neuter, monseigneur, if you find that I act as a gentleman ought to act."

"Young man," said Richelieu, "if I am able to say to you again once more what I have said to you to-day, I promise you to do so."

This last expression of Richelieu's conveyed a terrible doubt; it alarmed d'Artagnan more than a menace would have done, for it was a warning. The Cardinal, then, was seeking to preserve him from some misfortune which threatened him. He opened his mouth to reply, but with a haughty gesture the Minister dismissed him.

D'Artagnan went out, but at the door his heart almost failed him, and he felt inclined to return. But the noble and severe countenance of Athos crossed his mind: if he made the compact with the Cardinal which he required, Athos would no more give him his hand, and renounce him.

It was this fear that restrained him,—so powerful is the influence of a truly great character on all that surrounds it.

D'Artagnan descended by the staircase at which he had entered, and found Athos and the four waiting his appearance, and beginning to grow uneasy. With a word d'Artagnan reassured them, and Planchet ran to inform the other post that it was useless to keep guard longer, as his master had come out safe from the Palais-Cardinal.

When they reached Athos's residence, Aramis and Porthos inquired eagerly the cause of this strange interview, but d'Artagnan confined himself to telling them that Richelieu had sent for him to propose to him to enter into his guards with the rank of ensign, and that he had refused.

"And you were quite right," cried Aramis and Porthos, with one voice.

Athos fell into a profound reverie and answered nothing. But when they were alone,—

"You have done that which you ought to have done, d'Artagnan," said Athos,—"but yet, perhaps, you have done wrong."

D'Artagnan sighed deeply, for this voice responded to a secret voice of his soul, which told him that great misfortunes awaited him.

At the first sound of the morning trumpet the friends separated, the Musketeers hastening to M. de Treville's, the guards to M. Desessarts's. Each of the captains then led his company to the Louvre, where the King passed them in review.

The review over, the guards set forward alone on their march, the Musketeers waiting for the King, which allowed Porthos time to go and take a turn, in his superb equipment, in the Rue aux Ours.

But the real adieus were made in Madame Coquenard's chamber; they were heart-rending!

As long as she could follow him with her eyes, she waved her handkerchief to him, leaning so far out of the window as to lead people to believe she was about to precipitate herself after her Musketeer. Porthos received all these attentions like a man accustomed to such demonstrations; only, on turning the corner of the street, he lifted his hat gracefully and waved it to her as a sign of adieu.

On his part, Aramis wrote a long letter. To whom? Nobody knew. Kitty, who was to set out that evening for Tours, was waiting in the next chamber, to take it.

Athos sipped the last bottle of his Spanish wine.

In the meantime, d'Artagnan was defiling with his company. On arriving at the Faubourg St. Antoine, he turned round to look gaily at the Bastile; but as it was the Bastile alone he looked at, he did not observe My Lady, who, mounted upon a light chestnut horse, pointed him out with her finger to two ill-looking men who came close up to the ranks to take notice of him. To a look of interrogation which they made, My Lady replied by a sign that that was the person. Then, certain that there could be no mistake in the execution of her orders, she turned her horse and disappeared.

The two ruffians followed the company, and at leaving the Faubourg St. Antoine, mounted two horses properly equipped, which a servant out of livery was holding in expectation of their coming.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

THE SIEGE OF LA ROCHELLE.

THE siege of La Rochelle was one of the great political events of the reign of Louis XIII., and one of the great military enterprises of the Cardinal.

La Rochelle, which had derived a new importance from the ruin of the other Calvinist cities, was then the focus of dissentious and ambitious views. Moreover, its port was the last port in the kingdom of France open to the English, and by closing it against England, the Cardinal completed the work of Joan of Arc and the Duke de Guise. Richelieu, as every one knows, had been in love with the Queen: was this love a simple political affair, or was it naturally one of those profound passions which Anna of Austria inspired in those who approached her? That we are not able to say; but, at all events, we have seen, by the anterior developments of this history, that Buckingham had had the advantage over him, and in two or three circumstances, particularly that of the diamond studs, had, thanks to the devotedness of the three Musketeers, and the courage and conduct of d'Artagnan, cruelly mystified him.

It was, then, Richelieu's object, not only to get rid of an enemy of France, but to avenge himself of a rival; but this vengeance ought to be great and striking, and worthy in every way of a man who held in his hand, as his weapon for combat, the forces of a whole kingdom.

It resulted from this, that the veritable stake of this game, which two of the most powerful kingdoms played for the good pleasure of two men in love, was simply—a kind look from Anna of Austria.

Till the King and the Cardinal could take the command of the siege of La Rochelle, which was determined on, he had sent the King's brother to direct the first operations, and had ordered all the troops he could dispose of to march towards the theatre of war. It was of this detachment, sent as a vanguard, that our friend d'Artagnan formed a part.

The King, as we have said, was to follow; but on the 28th of June, he felt attacked by a fever. He was, notwithstanding, anxious to set out; but his illness becoming more serious, he was forced to stop at Villeroi.

Now, whenever the King stopped, the Musketeers stopped. It resulted that d'Artagnan, who was as yet purely and simply in the guards, found himself, for the time at least, separated from his good friends, Athos, Aramis, and Porthos. This separation, which was no more than an unpleasant circumstance, would have certainly become a cause of serious uneasiness, if he had been able to guess by what unknown dangers he was surrounded.

He, however, arrived without accident in the camp established before La Rochelle, on the 10th of the month of September of the year 1627.

Everything was in the same state; the Duke of Buckingham and his English, masters of the Isle of Re, continued to besiege, but without success, the citadel of St. Martin and the fort of La Pree; and hostilities with La Rochelle had commenced, two or three days before, about a fort which the Duke of d'Angouleme had caused to be constructed near the city.

The guards, under the command of M. Desessarts, took up their quarters at the Minimes; but, as we know, d'Artagnan, preoccupied by the ambition of passing into the Musketeers, had formed but few friendships among his comrades, and he felt himself isolated, and given up to his own reflections, not very cheerful. From the time of his arrival in Paris he had been mixed up with public affairs; but his own private affairs had not made any great progress, as regarded either love or fortune.

What he had clearly gained was the diamond, worth five or six thousand livres, which he wore on his finger; and even this diamond, supposing that d'Artagnan, in his projects of ambition, wished to keep it, to make it some day a pledge for the gratitude of the Queen, had not, in the meanwhile, since he could not part with it, more value than the stones he trod under his feet.

We say than the stones he trod under his feet, for d'Artagnan made these reflections whilst walking solitarily along a pretty little road which led from the camp to the village of Angoutin.

Now, these reflections had led him further than he intended, and the day was beginning to decline, when, by the last ray of the setting sun, he thought he saw the barrel of a musket glitter from behind a hedge.

D'Artagnan had a quick eye, and a prompt understanding. He naturally supposed that that musket had not come there of itself, and that he who bore it had not concealed himself behind a hedge with any friendly intentions. He determined, therefore, to direct his course as clear from it as he could, when, on the opposite side of the road, from behind a rock, he perceived the extremity of another musket-barrel.

This was evidently an ambuscade.

The young man cast a glance at the first musket, and saw, with a certain degree of inquietude, that it was leveled in his direction; but as soon as he perceived that the orifice of the barrel was motionless, he threw himself upon the ground; at the same instant the gun was fired, and he heard the whistling of a ball pass over his head.

No time was to be lost. D'Artagnan sprang up with a bound, and at the same instant the ball from the other musket tore up the stones on the very place on the road where he had thrown himself with his face to the ground.

D'Artagnan was not one of those uselessly brave men who seek a ridiculous death, in order that it may be said of them that they did not give way a single step; besides, courage was out of the question here.—d'Artagnan had fallen into a premeditated ambuscade.

"If there should be a third shot," said he, "I am a lost man."

He immediately, therefore, took to his heels, and ran towards the camp, with the swiftness of the young men of his country, so renowned for their agility; but whatever might be his speed, the first that fired, having had time to reload, fired a second

shot, and this time so well aimed, that it struck his hat, and carried it ten paces from him.

As he, however, had no other hat, he picked up this as he ran, and arrived at his quarters, very pale and quite out of breath. He sat down without saying a word to anybody, and began to reflect.

This event might have three causes:

The first and the most natural was, that it might be an ambuscade of the Rochellais, who might not have been sorry to kill one of his Majesty's guards; in the first place, because it would be an enemy the less, and that this enemy might have a well-furnished purse in his pocket.

D'Artagnan took his hat, examined the hole made by the ball, and shook his head. The ball was not a musket-ball—it was an arquebuss-ball. The justness of the aim had first given him the idea that a particular kind of weapon had been employed. This could not, then, be a military ambuscade, as the ball was not of the regular calibre.

This might be a kind remembrance of the Cardinal. It may be observed that at the very moment when, thanks to the ray of the sun, he perceived the gun-barrel, he was thinking with astonishment on the forbearance of his Eminence with respect to him.

But d'Artagnan again shook his head. For people towards whom he had put forth his hand, his Eminence had rarely recourse to such means.

It might be a vengeance of My Lady's—that was the most probable!

He endeavored in vain to remember the faces or dress of the assassins; he had escaped so rapidly, that he had not had leisure to remark anything.

"Ah! my poor friends!" murmured d'Artagnan; "where are you? How sadly I want you!"

D'Artagnan passed a very restless night. Three or four times he started up, imagining that a man was approaching his bed for the purpose of poniarding him. Nevertheless, day dawned without darkness having brought any accident.

But d'Artagnan justly suspected that that which was deferred was not lost.

D'Artagnan remained all day in his quarters, assigning as a reason to himself that the weather was bad.

At nine o'clock next morning, the drums beat to arms. The Duke of Orleans visited the posts. The guards were under arms, and d'Artagnan took his place in the midst of his comrades.

The Duke passed along the front of the line; then all the superior officers approached him to pay their compliments, Captain Desessarts of the guards, as well as the others.

At the expiration of a minute or two, it appeared to d'Artagnan that Desessarts made him a sign to come to him; he waited for a fresh gesture on the part of his superior, for fear he might

be mistaken; but this gesture being repeated, he left the ranks, and advanced to receive his orders.

"The prince is about to ask for volunteers for a forlorn hope which will do honor to those who shall accomplish it, and I made you a sign in order that you might hold yourself in readiness."

"Thanks! captain!" replied d'Artagnan, who wished for nothing better than an opportunity for distinguishing himself under the eye of the lieutenant-general.

In fact, the Rochellais had made a sortie during the night, and had retaken a bastion of which the royal army had gained possession two days before; the matter was to ascertain, by reconnoitring, how the enemy guarded this bastion.

At the end of a few minutes, the prince said:

"I want for this duty, three or four volunteers, led by a man who can be depended upon."

"As to the man to be depended upon, I have him under my hand, monseigneur," said Desessarts, pointing to d'Artagnan; "and as to the four or five volunteers, monseigneur has but to make his intentions known, and the men will not be wanting."

"Four men who will risk being killed with me!" said d'Artagnan, raising his sword.

Two of his comrades of the guards immediately sprang forward, and two other soldiers having joined them, the number was deemed sufficient; d'Artagnan declined all others, being unwilling to injure the chance of honor of those who came forward first.

It was not known whether, after the taking of the bastion, the Rochellais had evacuated it or left a garrison in it; the object then was to examine the place near enough to ascertain the thing.

D'Artagnan set out with his four companions, and followed the trench: the two guards marched abreast with him, and the two soldiers followed behind.

They arrived thus, screened by the lining of the trench, till they came within a hundred paces of the bastion! There, on turning round, d'Artagnan perceived that the two soldiers had disappeared.

He thought that, beginning to be afraid, they had stayed behind.

At the turning of the counterscarp they found themselves within about sixty paces of the bastion. They saw no one, and the bastion seemed abandoned. The three composing our forlorn hope were deliberating whether they should proceed any further, when all at once a circle of smoke enveloped the giant of stone, and a dozen balls came whistling round d'Artagnan and his companions. They knew all they wished to know; the bastion was guarded. A longer stay in this dangerous spot would have been useless imprudence: d'Artagnan and his two companions turned their backs, and commenced a retreat which looked very much like a flight.

On arriving at the angle of the trench which was to serve them as a rampart, one of the guards fell; a ball passed through his breast. The other, who was safe and sound, continued his way towards the camp.

D'Artagnan was not willing to abandon his companion thus, and stooped down to raise him and assist him in regaining the lines; but at this moment two shots were fired; one ball hit the head of the already wounded guard, and the other was flattened against a rock, after having passed within two inches of d'Artagnan.

The young man turned quickly round, for this attack could not come from the bastion, which was marked by the angle of the trench; the idea of the two soldiers who had abandoned him occurred to his mind, and with them that of the assassins of two evenings before; he resolved then, this time, to know what he had to trust to, and fell upon the body of his comrade as if he had been dead.

He quickly saw two heads appear above an abandoned work, within thirty paces of him; they were the heads of the two soldiers. D'Artagnan had not been deceived, these two men had only followed him for the purpose of assassinating him, hoping that the young man's death would be placed to the account of the enemy.

Only, as he might be wounded and might denounce their crime, they came up to him with the purpose of making sure of him; fortunately, deceived by d'Artagnan's trick, they neglected to reload their guns.

When they were within ten paces of him, d'Artagnan, who, in falling had taken care not to leave hold of his sword, sprang up close to them.

The assassins comprehended that if they fled towards the camp without having killed their man, they should be accused by him; therefore, their first idea was to pass over to the enemy. One of them took his gun by the barrel, and used it as he would a club; he aimed a terrible blow at d'Artagnan, who avoided it by springing on one side; but by this movement he left a passage free to the bravo, who darted off towards the bastion. As the Rochellais who guarded the bastion were ignorant of the intentions of the man they saw coming towards them, they fired upon him, and he fell, struck by a ball, which broke his shoulder.

In the meantime, d'Artagnan had thrown himself upon the other soldier, attacking him with his sword; the conflict was not long; the wretch had nothing to defend himself with but his discharged arquebuss; the sword of the guard slipped down the barrel of the now useless weapon, and passed through the thigh of the assassin, who fell.

D'Artagnan immediately placed the point of his sword at his throat.

"Oh, do not kill me!" cried the murderer. "Pardon, pardon! my officer! and I will tell you all."

"Is your secret of enough importance for me to spare your life for it?" asked the young man, withholding his arm.

"Yes! if you think existence worth anything to a man of twenty, as you are, and who may hope for everything, being handsome and brave, as you are."

"Wretch!" cried d'Artagnan, "speak and speak quickly! who employed you to assassinate me?"

"A woman whom I don't know; but who is called My Lady."

"But if you don't know this woman, how do you know her name?"

"My comrade knows her, and called her so; it was with him she agreed, and not with me; he even has in his pocket a letter from that person, who attaches great importance to you, as I have heard him say."

"But how did you become concerned in this villainous affair?"

"He proposed to me to undertake it with him, and I agreed."

"And how much did she give you for this fine enterprise?"

"A hundred louis."

"Well, come!" said the young man, laughing, "she thinks I am worth something! A hundred louis! Well, that was a temptation for two miserable creatures like you; so I understand you accepted it, and I grant you my pardon; but upon one condition!"

"What is that?" said the soldier, uneasy at perceiving that all was not over.

"That you will go and fetch me the letter your comrade has in his pocket."

"Why," cried the cut-throat, "that is only another way of killing me; how can I go and fetch that letter under the fire of the bastion?"

"You must, however, make up your mind to go and fetch it, or you shall die by my hand."

"Pardon! Monsieur, have pity on me! In the name of that young lady you love, and whom you perhaps think is dead, but is not!" cried the assassin, throwing himself upon his knees, and leaning upon his hand, for he began to lose his strength with his blood.

"And how do you know there is a young woman that I love, or that I thought that woman dead?" asked d'Artagnan.

"By that letter which my comrade had in his pocket."

"You see, then," said d'Artagnan, "that I must have that letter; so no more delay, no more hesitation; or else, whatever may be my repugnance to soiling my sword a second time with the blood of a wretch like you, I swear by the word of a gentleman——"

And at these words d'Artagnan made so menacing a gesture that the wounded man sprang up.

"Stop, stop!" cried he, regaining strength from terror, "I will go—I will go!"

D'Artagnan took the soldier's arquebuss, made him go on

before him, and urged him towards his companion by pricking him behind with his sword.

It was a frightful thing to see this unfortunate being, leaving a long track of blood upon the ground he passed over, pale with approaching death, endeavoring to drag himself along without being seen, to the body of his accomplice, which lay at twenty paces from him.

Terror was so strongly painted on his face, covered with a cold sweat, that d'Artagnan took pity on him, and casting upon him a look of contempt.

"Stop!" said he, "I will show you the difference between a man of true courage and such a base creature as you; stay where you are, I will go myself."

And, with a light step, an eye on the watch, observing the movements of the enemy, and taking advantage of the accidents of the ground, d'Artagnan succeeded in reaching the second soldier.

There were two means of gaining his object; to search him on the spot, or to carry him away, making a buckler of his body, and searching him in the trench.

D'Artagnan preferred the second means, and lifted the assassin on to his shoulders at the moment the enemy fired.

A slight shock, the dull noise of three balls which penetrated the flesh, a last cry, a convulsion of agony, proved to d'Artagnan that he who had endeavored to assassinate him had saved his life.

D'Artagnan regained the trench, and threw the body down by the wounded man, who was as pale as death.

The search was instantly commenced; a leather pocket-book, a purse, in which was evidently a part of the sum which the bandit had received, with a dice-box and dice, formed the dead man's inheritance.

He left the box and dice where he found them, threw the purse to the wounded man, and eagerly opened the pocketbook.

Amongst some unimportant papers he found the following letter; that which he had sought at the risk of his life:

Since you have lost sight of that woman, and she is now in safety in the convent at which you should never have allowed her to arrive, try, at least, not to miss the man; if you do, you know that my hand reaches far, and that you shall repay me very dearly the hundred louis you have had of me."

No signature. Nevertheless it was plain the letter came from My Lady. He consequently kept it as a piece of evidence, and being in safety behind the angle of the trench, he began to interrogate the wounded man. He confessed that he had undertaken, with his comrade that was killed, to carry off a young woman who was to leave Paris by the barrier of La Villette; but having stopped to drink, they had missed the carriage by ten minutes.

"But what were you to have done with that woman?" asked d'Artagnan, with great agitation.

"We were to have conveyed her to a mansion in the Place Royale," said the wounded man.

"Yes! yes!" murmured d'Artagnan; "that's the place; My Lady's own residence!"

The young man tremblingly felt what a terrible thirst of vengeance urged this woman on to destroy him, as well as all who loved him, and how well she must be acquainted with the affairs of the court, since she had discovered everything. There could be no doubt she owed this information to the Cardinal.

But amidst all this he perceived, with a feeling of real joy, that the Queen must have discovered the prison in which poor Madame Bonacieux expiated her devotedness, and that she had freed her from that prison. And the letter he had received from the young woman, with her passing along the road of Chaillot like an apparition, were now explained.

From that time, also, as Athos had predicted, it became possible to find Madame Bonacieux, and a convent was not impregnable.

This idea completely restored clemency to his heart. He turned towards the wounded man, who had watched with intense anxiety all the various expressions of his countenance, and holding out his arm to him,—

"Come," said he, "I will not abandon you thus. Lean upon me, and let us return to the camp."

"Yes," said the man, who could scarcely believe in such magnanimity, "but is not that to have me hanged?"

"You have my word," said he; "for the second time I give you your life."

The wounded man sank upon his knees, to again kiss the feet of his preserver; but d'Artagnan, who had no longer a motive for staying so near the enemy, cut short the evidences of his gratitude.

The guard who had returned at the first discharge had announced the death of his four companions. They were therefore much astonished and delighted, in the regiment, when they saw the young man come back safe and sound.

D'Artagnan explained the sword-wound of his companion by a sortie which he improvised. He described the death of the other soldier, and the perils they had encountered. This recital was for him the occasion of a veritable triumph. The whole army talked of this expedition for a day, and Prince Gaston paid him his compliments upon it. Besides this, as every great action bears its own recompense with it, the great action of d'Artagnan had for result the restoration of the tranquillity he had lost. In fact, d'Artagnan believed that he might indulge in a little tranquillity, as of his two enemies one was killed, and the other devoted to his interests.

This tranquillity proved one thing, which was that d'Artagnan was not yet perfectly acquainted with My Lady.

CHAPTER XL.

THE PRESENT OF WINE.

D'ARTAGNAN, as we have said, had become more tranquil, as always happens after a past danger, particularly when that danger seems to have vanished; he only felt one uneasiness, and that was at not hearing from his three friends.

But one morning at the commencement of the month of November, everything was explained to him by this letter, dated from Villeroi:—

M. D'ARTAGNAN:

MM. Athos, Porthos, and Aramis, after having had an entertainment at my house, and enjoyed themselves very much, created such a disturbance, that the provost, a very rigid man, has ordered them to be confined for some days; but I accomplish the order they have given me, by forwarding to you a dozen bottles, of my Anjou wine, with which they are much pleased; they are desirous that you should drink to their health in their favorite wine. I have done accordingly, and am, monsieur, with great respect,

Your very humble and obedient servant,

GODEAU,

Messkeeper of the Royal Musketeers.

"That's all well!" cried d'Artagnan, "they think of me in their pleasures, as I thought of them in my troubles. Well, I will certainly drink to their health with all my heart, but I will not drink alone."

And d'Artagnan went among the guards with whom he had formed greater intimacy than with the others, to invite them to enjoy with him this present of delicious Anjou wine which had been sent him from Villeroi.

One of the two guards was engaged that evening, and another the next; so that the meeting was fixed for the day after that.

D'Artagnan, on his return, sent the twelve bottles of wine to the guards' canteen with strict orders that great care should be taken of it; and then, on the day appointed, as the dinner was fixed for twelve o'clock, d'Artagnan sent Planchet, at nine in the morning, to assist in preparing everything for the entertainment.

Planchet, very proud of being raised to the dignity of steward, thought he would get all ready like an intelligent man, and with this view called in the assistance of the lackey of one of his master's guests, named Fourreau, and the sham soldier who had endeavored to kill d'Artagnan, and who, belonging to no corps, had entered into the service of d'Artagnan, or rather of Planchet, since d'Artagnan had saved his life.

The hour of the banquet being come, the two guests arrived, took their places, and the dishes were arranged upon the table. Planchet waited, towel on arm; Fourreau uncorked the bottles, and Brisemont, the name of the convalescent, poured the wine, which was a little shaken by its journey, carefully into glass decanters. Of this wine, the first bottle being a little thick at the bottom, Brisemont poured the lees into a glass, and d'Artag-

nan desired him to drink it, for the poor devil had not half recovered his strength.

The guests, after having eaten the soup, were about to lift the first glass of wine to their lips, when all at once the cannon sounded from Fort Louis and Fort Neuf; the guards, imagining this to be caused by some unexpected attack, either of the besieged or the English, sprang to their swords; d'Artagnan, not less forward than they, did so likewise, and all ran out, in order to repair to their posts.

But scarcely were they out, than they were made aware of the cause of this noise: cries of "Long live the King! Hail to the Cardinal!" resounded on every side, and the drums were beaten in all directions.

In short, the King, impatient, as we have said, had come by forced marches, and had arrived at that moment with all his household and a reinforcement of ten thousand troops: his Musketeers preceded and followed him.

The ceremony of the arrival over, the four friends were soon together. "Well!" cried d'Artagnan, "you could not have arrived on better time; the dinner cannot have had time to get cold! can it, gentlemen?" added the young man, turning to the two guards, whom he introduced to his friends.

"Soho!" said Porthos, "it appears we are feasting, then!"

"I hope," said Aramis, "there are no women in your party."

"Is there any drinkable wine in your tavern?" asked Athos.

"Rather! there is your own, my dear friend," replied d'Artagnan, "that you sent me."

"We send you wine?"

"Yes; nonsense, you know what I mean; the wine from the hills of Anjou."

"And so, connoisseurs in wine as we are, we have sent you some Anjou wine, eh! have we?" said Porthos.

"Not exeactly, it is the wine that was sent me on your account. Well, if it was not you, it was your messman," said d'Artagnan—"Godeau, the messman of the Musketeers."

"Never mind where it comes from," said Porthos; "let us taste it, and if it is good, let us drink it."

"No," said Athos, "don't let us drink wine which comes from an unknown source.

"You are right, Athos," said d'Artagnan. "Did none of you order Godeau to send me some wine?"

"No! and yet you say he has sent you some as from us?"

"Here is his letter," said d'Artagnan, and he presented the note to his comrades.

"That is not his writing!" said Athos, "I know it; before we left Villeroi, I settled the accounts of the regiment."

"It is a false letter altogether," said Porthos, "we have not been confined."

"D'Artagnan," said Aramis, in a reproachful tone, "how could you believe that we had made a riot?"

D'Artagnan grew pale, and a convulsive trembling shook all his limbs.

"You alarm me!" said Athos, "what has happened?"

"Hasten! hasten! my friend!" cried d'Artagnan, "a horrible suspicion crosses my mind! can this be another vengeance on the part of that woman?"

It was now Athos's turn to become pale.

D'Artagnan rushed towards the canteen, the three Musketeers and the two guards following him.

The first object that met the eyes of d'Artagnan, on entering, was Brisemont, stretched upon the ground and rolling in horrible convulsions.

Planchet and Fourreau, as pale as death, were endeavoring to render him assistance; but it was plain that all assistance was useless; all the features of the dying man were distorted with agony.

"Oh!" cried he, on perceiving d'Artagnan, "Oh! this is frightful! you pretend to pardon me, and you poison me, you wished to avenge yourself on me, and I say that it is horrible!"

"Do not think so, Brisemont," said d'Artagnan; "do not think so; I swear to you, I protest——"

"Oh! but God is above! He will punish you! My God! grant that he may one day suffer what I suffer!"

"Upon the Gospel," said d'Artagnan, throwing himself down by the dying man, "I swear to you that the wine was poisoned and that I was going to drink of it as you did."

"I do not believe you," cried the soldier, and he expired amidst horrible tortures.

"Frightful! frightful!" murmured Athos, while Porthos broke the bottles and Aramis gave orders, a little too late, that a confessor should be sent for.

"Oh! my friends," said d'Artagnan, "you come once more to save my life, not only mine, but these gentlemen's. Gentlemen," continued he, addressing the guards, "I request you will be silent with rgard to this adventure; great personages may have had a hand in what you have seen, and, if talked about, the evil would only recoil upon us."

"Oh! master!" stammered Planchet, more dead than alive, "oh! what an escape I have had!"

"How, sirrah! you were going to drink my wine, were you!"

"To the health of the King; I was going to drink a small glass of it, if Fourreau had not told me I was called."

"Alas!" said Fourreau, whose teeth chattered with terror, "I wanted to get him out of the way that I might drink by myself!"

"Gentlemen," said d'Artagnan, addressing the guards, "you may easily comprehend that such a feast can be but very dull, after what has taken place; so accept my excuses, and put off the party till another day, I beg of you."

The two guards courteously accepted d'Artagnan's excuses, and perceiving that the four friends desired to be alone, retired.

The host gave the latter another chamber, and served them

with fresh eggs and some water, which Athos went himself to draw at the wells. In a few words, Porthos and Aramis were informed of past events.

"Well!" said d'Artagnan to Athos, "you see, my dear friend, that this is war to the death!"

Athos shook his head.

"Athos, she is your wife, I tell you," repeated d'Artagnan; "only reflect how much your description agrees with mine."

"Yes, but I should think the other must be dead, I hanged her so effectually."

It was d'Artagnan who now shook his head in his turn.

"But, in either case, what is to be done?" said the young man.

"Time, dear friend, time brings round opportunity, opportunity is the martingale of man: the more we have ventured, the more we gain, when we know how to wait."

"Yes, but to wait surrounded by assassins and poisoners."

"Bah!" said Athos, "God has preserved us hitherto, God will preserve us still."

"Yes, we; we, besides, are men; and everything considered, it is our lot to risk our lives; but she," added he in an undertone. "Constance?"

"Madame Bonacieux! ah! that's true," said Athos, "my poor friend, I had forgotten you were in love."

"Well, but," said Aramis, "have you not learned by the letter you found on the assassin that she is in a convent? She may be very comfortable in a convent; and as soon as the siege of Rochelle is terminated, I promise you, on my part——"

"Good!" cried Athos, "good! yes, Aramis, we all know that your views have a religious tendency."

"I am only a Musketeer for the time," said Aramis, humbly.

"Well!" said Porthos, "it appears to me that the means are very simple. As soon as the siege is over, we'll carry her off from that convent."

"I think I have it," said Athos. "Don't you say, d'Artagnan, that it is the Queen who has made choice of the convent for her?"

"I believe so, at least."

"In that case," said Aramis, "I take upon myself to obtain intelligence of her."

"You, Aramis!" cried the three friends, "how?"

"By the Queen's almoner, with whom I am very intimately acquainted," said Aramis, coloring.

And upon this assurance, the four friends, who had finished their modest repast, separated, with the promise of meeting again that evening; d'Artagnan returned to the Minimes, and the three Musketeers repaired to the King's quarters, where they had to prepare their lodging.

CHAPTER XLI.

THE RED DOVE INN.

In the meanwhile, the King, although scarcely arrived, who was in such haste to face the enemy, and who, with more reason than the Cardinal, showed his hatred for Buckingham, commanded every disposition to be made to drive the English from the Isle of Re, and afterwards to press the siege of La Rochelle.

Information coming that everything was preparing in the enemy's camp for a fresh assault, the King judged that it would be best to put an end to the affair, and gave the necessary orders for a decisive action.

It not being our intention to make a journal of the siege, but on the contrary only to describe such of the events of it as are connected with the history we are relating, we will content ourselves with saying in two words that the expedition succeeded, to the great astonishment of the King, and the great glory of the Cardinal.

Te Deums were sung in the camp, and afterwards throughout France.

The Cardinal was left master of carrying on the siege without having, at least at the present, anything to fear on the part of the English.

But, as we have said, this repose was but for the moment.

An envoy of the Duke of Buckingham, named Montague, was taken, and proof was obtained of a league between the empire, Spain, England, and Lorraine, directed against France.

Still further, in Buckingham's quarters, which he had been forced to abandon more precipitately than he expected, papers were found which confirmed this league, and strongly compromised the Duchess de Chevreuse, and consequently the Queen. It was upon the Cardinal that all the responsibility fell, for there is no being a despotic minister without responsibility; therefore couriers, becoming every instant more numerous, succeeded each other, day and night, in the little house of the bridge of La Pierre, in which the Cardinal had established his residence.

On their part, the Musketeers, who had not much to do with the siege, were not under very strict orders, and led a joyous life. This was the more easy for our three companions in particular, as being friends of M. de Treville's, they obtained from him permission to be absent after the closing of the camp.

Now, one evening, when d'Artagnan, who was in the trenches, was not able to accompany them, Athos, Porthos, and Aramis, mounted upon their battle-steeds, enveloped in their war cloaks, with their hands upon their pistol-butts, were returning from a canteen which Athos had discovered two days before upon the route to La Jairie, called the Red Dove, following the road which led to the camp, and quite upon their guard, as we have stated, for fear of an ambuscade, when at about a quarter of a league from the village of Boinar, they fancied they heard the sound of horses approaching them. They immediately all three halted,

closed in, and waited, occupying the middle of the road. At the end of an instant, and as the moon broke from behind a cloud, they saw, at a turning of the road, two horsemen who, on perceiving them, stopped in their turn, appearing to deliberate whether they should continue their route or go back. The hesitation created some suspicion in the three friends, and Athos advancing a few paces in front of the others, cried in a firm voice:

"Who goes there?"

"Who goes there, yourselves?" replied one of the horsemen.

"That is not an answer," replied Athos. "Who goes there? Answer, or else we charge."

"Beware of what you are about, gentlemen!" said a clear voice, which appeared accustomed to command.

"It is some superior officer, making his night rounds," said Athos. "What do you mean to do, gentlemen?"

"Who are you?" said the same voice in the same commanding tone; "answer in your turn, or you may repent of your disobedience."

"King's Musketeers," said Athos, still more convinced that he who interrogated them had the right to do so.

"Of what company?"

"Company of Treville."

"Advance, and render me an account of what you are doing here at this time of night."

The three companions advanced rather humbly, for all were now convinced that they had to do with some one more powerful than themselves, leaving Athos the post of speaker.

"Your pardon, officer!" said Athos; "give me, I beg of you, the proof that you have the right to question me."

"Your name?" repeated the cavalier a second time, letting his cloak fall, and leaving his face uncovered.

"The Cardinal!" cried the stupefied Musketeer.

"Your name?" cried the Cardinal for the third time.

"Athos!" said the Musketeer.

The Cardinal made a sign to his attendant, who drew near to him,—

"These three Musketeers shall follow us," said he in an undervoice; "I am not willing it should be known I have left the camp; and by following us we shall be certain they will tell nobody."

"We are gentlemen, monseigneur," said Athos; "require our parole, and give yourself no uneasiness. Thank God! we can keep a secret."

"You have a quick ear, Monsieur Athos," said the Cardinal; "but now listen to this; it is not from mistrust that I request you to follow me, but for my security; your companions are, no doubt, MM. Porthos and Aramis. I shall have an escort to excite envy in his Majesty, if we should meet him."

The three Musketeers bowed to the necks of their horses.

"Well, upon my honor," said Athos, "your Eminence is right

in taking us with you; we have seen several ill-looking faces on the road, and we have even had a quarrel at the Red Dovecote with four of those faces."

"A quarrel, and what for, gentlemen?" said the Cardinal; "you know I don't like quarrellers."

"And that is the reason why I have the honor to inform your Eminence of what has happened; for you might learn it from others, and upon a false account, believe us to be in fault."

"What have been the results of your quarrel?" said the Cardinal, knitting his brow.

"My friend Aramis, here, has received a slight sword-wound in the arm, but not enough to prevent him, as your Eminence may see, from mounting to the assault to-morrow, if your Eminence orders an escalade."

"But you are not the men to allow sword-wounds to be inflicted upon you thus," said the Cardinal; "come, be frank, gentlemen, you have given a good account of some persons; confess, you know I have the right of giving absolution."

"Who? I! Monseigneur?" said Athos. "I did not even draw my sword, but I took him who offended me round the body, and threw him out of the window; it appears that in falling," continued Athos, with some hesitation, "he broke his thigh."

"Ah!" said the Cardinal; "and you, Monsieur Porthos?"

"I, Monseigneur, knowing that duelling is prohibited, I seized a bench, and gave one of these brigands such a blow, that I believe his shoulder is broken."

"Very well!" said the Cardinal; "and you, Monsieur Aramis?"

"For my part, Monseigneur, being of a very mild disposition, and being likewise about to enter into holy orders, I endeavored to appease my comrades, when one of these wretches gave me a wound with a sword, treacherously, across my left arm; then I admit my patience failed me; I drew my sword in my turn, and as he came back to the charge, I fancied I felt that in throwing himself upon me, he let it pass through his body: I only know, for a certainty, that he fell, and that he appeared to be borne away with his two companions."

"The devil, gentlemen!" said the Cardinal, "three men disabled in a squabble! you don't do your work by halves; and pray what was this quarrel about?"

"These fellows were drunk," said Athos, "and knowing there was a lady who had arrived at the cabaret this evening, they wanted to force her door."

"And was this lady young and handsome?" asked the Cardinal with a certain degree of anxiety.

"We did not see her, Monseigneur," said Athos.

"You did not see her? ah! very well," replied the Cardinal, quickly: "you acted quite rightly in defending the honor of a woman; and as I am going to the Red Dovecote myself, I shall know whether you have told me truth or not."

"Monseigneur," said Athos, haughtily, "we are gentlemen, and to save our heads we would not be guilty of a falsehood."

"Therefore, I do not doubt what you say, M. Athos, I do not doubt it for a single instant; but," added he, to change the conversation, "was this lady alone?"

"The lady had a cavalier shut up with her," said Athos, "but as notwithstanding the noise, this cavalier did not show himself, it is to be presumed that he is a coward."

"Judge not rashly, says the Gospel," replied the Cardinal.

Athos bowed.

"And now, gentlemen, that's all very well," continued the Cardinal. "I know what I wish to know; follow me."

The three Musketeers passed behind his Eminence, who again enveloped his face in his cloak, and put his horse in motion; keeping at from eight to ten paces in advance of his companions.

They soon arrived at the silent, solitary inn; no doubt the host knew what illustrious visitor he expected, and had consequently sent intruders out of the way.

At ten paces from the door the Cardinal made a sign to his attendant and the three to halt; a saddled horse was fastened to the window-shutter, the Cardinal knocked three times, and in a peculiar manner.

A man, enveloped in a cloak, came out immediately, and exchanged some rapid words with the Cardinal; after which he mounted his horse and set off in the direction of Surgeres, and Paris.

"You have told me the truth, gentlemen," said the Cardinal, addressing the Musketeers, "and it will not be my fault if our meeting this evening be not advantageous to you: in the meantime, follow me."

He alighted, the three did so likewise; the Cardinal threw the bridle of his horse to his attendant, the three fastened their horses to the shutter.

The host stood at the door; for him, the Cardinal was only an officer coming to visit a lady.

"Have you any chamber on the ground floor where these gentlemen can wait, near a good fire?" said the Cardinal.

The host opened the door of a large room, in which an old bad stove had just been replaced by a large and excellent chimney.

"I have this, master," said he.

"That will do," replied the Cardinal; "come in, gentlemen, and be kind enough to wait for me; I shall not be more than half an hour."

And whilst the three Musketeers entered the ground-floor room, the Cardinal, without asking further information, ascended the staircase like a man who has no need of having his road pointed out to him.

CHAPTER XLII.

THE UTILITY OF STOVE-PIPES.

It was evident that without suspecting it, and actuated solely by their chivalric and adventurous character, our three friends

had just rendered a service to some one the Cardinal honored with his particular protection.

Now, who could that some one be? That was the question the three Musketeers put to each other; then, seeing that none of the replies could throw any light on the subject, Porthos called the host, and asked for dice.

Porthos and Aramis placed themselves at the table and began to play. Athos walked about, in a contemplative mood.

Whilst thinking and walking, Athos passed and repassed before the pipe of the stove broken in half, the other extremity of which passed into the upper chamber; and every time he passed, he heard a murmur of words, which at length fixed his attention. Athos went close to it, and distinguished some words that appeared to merit so great an interest that he made a sign to his friends to be silent, remaining himself bent with his ear directed to the opening of the lower orifice.

"Listen, My Lady," said the Cardinal, "the affair is important; sit down, and let us talk it over."

"My Lady!" murmured Athos.

"I am listening to your Eminence with the greatest attention," replied a female voice that made the Musketeer start.

"A small vessel, with an English crew, whose captain is my man, awaits you at the mouth of the Charente, at the Point Fort; he will set sail to-morrow morning."

"I must go thither to-night, then?"

"Instantly! that is to say, when you have received my instructions. Two men, whom you will find at the door, on going out, will serve you as escort; you will allow me to leave first, and, half an hour after, you can go away in your turn."

There was an instant of profound silence between the two interlocutors; it was evident the Cardinal was weighing beforehand the terms in which he was about to speak, and that the lady was collecting all her faculties to comprehend the things he was about to say, and to engrave them in her memory when they should be spoken.

Athos took advantage of this moment to tell his two companions to fasten the door on the inside, and to make them a sign to come and listen with him.

The two Musketeers, who loved their ease, brought a chair for each of themselves and one for Athos. All three then sat down with their heads together, and their ears on the watch.

"You will go to London," continued the Cardinal; "when arrived, seek Buckingham."

"I must beg your Eminence to observe," said My Lady, "that since the affair of the diamond studs, about which the Duke always suspected me, his Grace has been very mistrustful of me."

"Well, this time," said the Cardinal, "it is not the question to stead his confidence, but to present yourself frankly and loyally as a negotiator."

"Frankly and loyally," repeated My Lady, with an unspeakable expression of duplicity.

"Yes," replied the Cardinal, in the same tone; "all this negotiation must be carried on openly."

"I will follow your Eminence's instructions to the letter; I only wait your giving them."

"You will go to Buckingham on my part, and you will tell him I am acquainted with all the preparations he has made, but that they give me no uneasiness, since, at the first step he takes, I will ruin the Queen."

"Will he believe that your Eminence is in a position to accomplish the threat you make him?"

"Yes, for I have the proofs. Tell him, further, Montague is in my power, in the Bastile; no letters were found upon him, it is true, but that pressure may make him say much of what he knows, and even—what he does not know."

"Exactly."

"Then add, that his Grace has, in his precipitation to quit the Isle of Re, forgotten and left behind him in his lodging a letter from Lady de Chevreuse, which singularly compromises the Queen, inasmuch as it proves not only that her Majesty can love the enemies of France, but that she can conspire with them."

"Your Eminence will judge: the ball; the night at the Louvre; the evening at Amiens; the arrest of Montague; the letter of Madame de Chevreuse."

"That's it," said the Premier, "that's it; you have an excellent memory, My Lady."

"But," resumed the lady to whom the Cardinal had addressed this flattering compliment, "if, in spite of all these reasons, the Duke does not give way, and continues to menace France?"

"If he persists——" His Eminence made a pause, and resumed: "If he persists—well, then I shall hope for one of those events which change the destinies of states. When in 1610, for a cause almost similar to that which moves the Duke, the King Henry IV., of glorious memory, was about, at the same time, to invade Flanders and Italy to attack Austria on both sides—well, did there not happen an event which saved Austria? Why should not the King of France have the same chance as the emperor?"

"Your Eminence means, I presume, the knife-stab in the street?"

"Exactly so," said the Minister.

"Does not your Eminence fear that the punishment inflicted upon the regicide Ravaillac may deter any one who might entertain the idea of imitating him?"

"There will be, in all times and in all countries, particularly if religious divisions exist in those countries, fanatics who ask nothing better than to become martyrs. Aye, and observe, it just recurs to me that the Puritans are furious against Buckingham, and their preachers designate him as the Anti-Christ."

"Well?" said My Lady.

"Well," continued the Cardinal, in an indifferent tone, "the only thing to be sought for, at this moment, is some woman,

handsome, young and clever, who has cause of quarrel with the Duke. The Duke has had many affairs of gallantry, and if he has succeeded in many amours by his promises of eternal constancy, he must likewise have sown the seeds of many hatreds by his eternal infidelities."

"No doubt," said My Lady, coolly, "such a woman may be found."

"Well, such a woman, who would place the knife of Jacques Clement, or of Ravaillac, in the hands of a fanatic, would save France."

"Yes, but she would be the accomplice of an assassination."

"Right," said Richelieu; "so you require——"

"An order which would ratify beforehand all that I should think proper to do for the greatest good of France."

"But, in the first place, this woman I have described must be found, who is desirous of avenging herself upon the Duke."

"She is found," said My Lady.

"Then the miserable fanatic must be found who will serve as an instrument of God's justice."

"He will be found."

"Well," said the Minister, "then it will be time to claim the order which you just now required."

"Your Eminence is right," replied My Lady; "and I have been wrong in seeing in the mission with which you honor me anything but that which it really is—that is to say, to announce to his Grace, on the part of your Eminence, that you are acquainted with the means of which he succeeded in approaching the Queen and so on. Then, if he persists, notwithstanding all this, as that is, as I have said, the limit of my mission, I shall have nothing to do but to pray God to work a miracle for the salvation of France. That is it, is it not, Monseigneur, and I shall have nothing else to do?"

"That is it," replied the Cardinal, dryly.

"And now," said My Lady, without appearing to remark the change of the Duke's tone towards her, "now that I have received the instructions of your Eminence as concerns your enemies, Monseigneur will permit me to say a few words to him of mine?"

"Have you enemies, then?" asked Richelieu.

"Yes, Monseigneur; in the first place, there is a little intriguing woman, named Bonacieux."

"She is in the prison of Nantes."

"That is to say, she was there," replied My Lady; "but the Queen has obtained an order from the King, by means of which she has been secretly conveyed to a convent. Your Eminence will tell me in what convent that woman is?"

"I see nothing inconvenient in that," said the Premier.

"Well, now I have an enemy much more to be dreaded by me than this little Madame Bonacieux—her lover."

"What is his name?"

"Oh, your Eminence knows him well," cried My Lady, car-

ried away by her anger. "He is the evil genius of both of us, it is he who, in a duel with your Eminence's guards, decided the victory in favor of the King's Musketeers; it is he who gave three desperate wounds to De Wardes, your emissary, and who caused the affair of the diamond studs to fail; it is he who, knowing it was I who had Madame Bonacieux carried off, has sworn my death. I mean that wretch d'Artagnan."

"He is a bold fellow," said the Cardinal.

"And it is because he is a bold fellow that he is the more to be feared."

"I must have," said the Duke, "a proof of his connection with Buckingham."

"A proof!" cried My Lady; "I will find you ten."

"Well, then, it becomes the simplest thing in the world; get me that proof, and I will send him to the Bastile."

"So far good, Monseigneur: but afterwards?"

"When once in the Bastile, there is no afterwards!" said the Prime Minister, in a low voice. "Ah!" continued he, "if it were as easy for me to get rid of my enemy as it is easy to get rid of yours, and if it were against such people you required impunity!"

"Monseigneur," replied My Lady, "a fair exchange—existence for existence, man for man; give me one, I will give you the other."

"I don't know what you mean, nor do I even desire to know what you mean," replied the Cardinal; "but I wish to please you, and see nothing inconvenient in giving you what you ask for with respect to so mean a creature; the more so as you tell me this paltry d'Artagnan is a libertine, a duellist, and a traitor."

"An infamous scoundrel, Monseigneur—infamous scoundrel!"

"Give me paper, a pen, and some ink, then," said the Duke.

"Here they are, Monseigneur."

There was a moment of silence, which proved that the Cardinal was employed in seeking the terms in which he should write the note, or else in writing it. Athos, who had not lost a word of the conversation, took his two companions by the hand, and led them to the other end of the room.

"Hush!" said Athos, speaking in a low voice, "I must be gone. Tell the Cardinal I am gone on the lookout, because expressions of our host's have given me reason to think the road is not safe; I will say two words about it to the Cardinal's attendant likewise; the rest concerns myself, don't be uneasy about that."

Porthos and Aramis resumed their places by the stove-pipe.

As to Athos, he went out without any mystery, took his horse, which was tied with his friends' to the fastenings of the shutters, in four words convinced the attendant of the necessity of a vanguard for their return, carefully examined the priming of his pistols, drew his sword, and took, like a scout, the road to the camp.

CHAPTER XLIII.

A CONJUGAL SCENE.

As Athos had foreseen, it was not long before the Cardinal came down; he opened the door of the room in which the Musketeers were, and found Porthos playing an earnest game at dice with Aramis. He cast a rapid glance round the room, and perceived that one of his men was missing.

"What is become of M. Athos?" asked he.

"Monseigneur," replied Porthos, "he is gone as a scout, upon some words of our host, which made him believe the road was not safe."

"And how have you amused yourself, M. Porthos?"

"I have won five pistoles of Aramis, Monseigneur."

"Well, now will you return with me?"

"We are at your Eminence's orders."

"To horse, then, gentlemen, for it is getting late."

The attendant was at the door, holding the Cardinal's horse by the bridle. At a short distance, a group of two men and three horses appeared in the shade; these were the two men who were to conduct My Lady to the fort, and superintend her embarkation.

For some distance Athos mantained the pace at which he started, but when out of sight, he turned his horse to the right, made a circuit, and came back within twenty paces of a high hedge, to watch the passage of the little troop; having recognized the laced hats of his companions and the golden fringe of the Cardinals cloak, he waited till the horsemen had turned the angle of the road, and having lost sight of them, he returned at a gallop to the inn, which was opened to him without hesitation.

The host recognized him.

"My officer," said Athos, "has forgotten to give a piece of very important information to the lady, and has sent me back to repair his forgetfulness."

"Go up," said the host, "she is still in her chamber."

Athos availed himself of the permission, ascended the stairs with his lightest step, gained the landing, and through the open door perceived My Lady putting on her hat.

He went straight into the chamber and closed the door after him.

At the noise he made in bolting it, My Lady turned round.

My Lady made one step forward, and then drew back, as if she had seen a serpent.

"The Count de la Fere!" murmured My Lady, becoming exceedingly pale, and drawing back till the wall prevented her going any further.

"Yes, My Lady," replied Athos, "the Count de la Fere in person, who comes expressly from the other world to have the pleasure of paying you a visit. Sit down, madame, and let us talk, as the Cardinal said."

My Lady, under the influence of inexpressible terror, sat down without uttering a word.

"You certainly are a demon sent upon the earth!" said Athos. "Your power is great, I know; but you also know that with the help of God men have often conquered the most terrible demons. You have once before thrown yourself in my path! I thought I had crushed you, madame; but either I was deceived, or hell has resuscitated you!"

My Lady, at these words, which recalled frightful remembrances, hung down her head, with a suppressed groan.

"Yes, hell has resuscitated you," continued Athos, "hell has made you rich, given you another name, almost made you another countenance; but it has neither effaced the stains from your soul nor the brand from your body!"

My Lady arose as if moved by a powerful spring, and her eyes flashed lightning. Athos remained sitting.

"You believed me to be dead, did you not, as I believed you to be? and the name of Athos as well concealed the Count de la Fere as the name of Lady Clarke concealed Anne de Beuil! Was it not so you were called when your honored 'brother' married us? Our position is truly a strange one," continued Athos, laughing, "we have only lived up to the present time because we believed each other to be dead, and because a remembrance is less oppressive than a living creature, though a remembrance is sometimes a devouring thing!"

"But," said My Lady, in a hollow, faint voice, "what brings you back to me? and what do you want with me?"

"I wish to tell you, that whilst remaining invisible to your eyes, I have not lost sight of you."

"You know what I have done and been?"

"I can relate to you, day by day, your actions, from your entrance into the service of the Cardinal to this evening."

"You must be Satan!" cried she.

"Perhaps," said Athos; "but, at all events, listen well to this. Assassinate the Duke of Buckingham, or cause him to be assassinated, I care very little about that. I don't know him; besides, he is an Englishman; but do not touch with the tip of your finger a single hair of d'Artagnan, who is a faithful friend, whom I love and defend, or, I swear to you by the head of my father, the crime which you shall have endeavored to commit, or shall have committed, shall be the last."

"D'Artagnan has cruelly insulted me," said My Lady, in a hollow tone; "d'Artagnan shall die!"

"Indeed! is it possible to insult you, madame?" said Athos, laughing.

"He shall die!" replied My Lady; "his beloved first, he afterwards."

Athos was seized with a kind of vertigo; the sight of this creature who had nothing of the woman about her, recalled devouring remembrances; he thought that one day, in a less dangerous situation than the one in which he was now placed, he

had already endeavored to sacrifice her to his honor; his desire for blood returned, burning his brain, and pervading his frame like a raging fever; he arose in his turn, reached his hand to his belt, drew forth a pistol, and cocked it.

My Lady, pale as a corpse, endeavored to cry out; but her swollen tongue could utter no more than a hoarse sound, which had nothing human in it, and seemed the rattle of a wild beast; fixed against the dark tapestry, she appeared with her hair in disorder, like a horrid image of terror.

Athos slowly raised his pistol, stretched out his arm, so that the weapon almost touched the lady's forehead, and then, in a voice the more terrible from having the supreme calmness of a fixed resolution:

"Madame," said he, "you will this instant deliver to me the paper the Cardinal signed, or, upon my soul, I will blow your brains out."

With another man, My Lady might have preserved some doubt; but she knew Athos; nevertheless, she remained motionless.

"You have one second to decide," said he.

My Lady saw by the frown that the trigger was about to be pulled; she reached her hand quickly to her bosom, drew out a paper, and held it towards Athos.

"Take it," said she, "curse you!"

Athos took the paper, returned the pistol to his belt, approached the lamp, unfolded the paper, and read:

It is by my order, and for the good of the state, that the bearer of this did what he has done.
December 3d, 1627. RICHELIEU.

And he left the chamber without once looking behind him.

At the door he found two men, and the spare horse which they held.

"Gentlemen," said he, "my Lord's order is, you know, to conduct that woman, without losing time, to the Point Fort, and never to leave her till she is on board."

As these orders agreed effectively with the order they had received, they bowed their heads in sign of assent.

With regard to Athos, he leaped lightly into the saddle, and set out at full gallop; only, instead of following the road, he took across the fields, urging his horse to the utmost, and stopping occasionally to listen.

In one of these halts, he heard the steps of several horses on the road. He had no doubt it was the Cardinal and his escort. He immediately made a new point in advance, rubbed his horse down with some heath and leaves of trees, and came and placed himself across the road at about two hundred paces from the camp.

"Who goes there?" cried he, as soon as he perceived the horsemen.

"That is our brave Musketeer, I think," said the Cardinal.

"Yes, Monseigneur," said Porthos, "it is he."

"M. Athos," said Richelieu, "receive my thanks for the good guard you have kept. Gentlemen, we are arrived; take the gate on the left; the watchword is 'Roi and Re.'"

On saying these words, the Cardinal saluted the three friends with an inclination of his head, and took the right hand, followed by his attendant; for, that night, he himself slept in the camp.

"Well!" said Porthos and Aramis, together, as soon as the Cardinal was out of hearing; "well! he signed the paper she required!"

"I know he did," said Athos, "since here it is."

And the three friends did not exchange a single word till they got to their quarters, except to give the watchword to the sentinels.

They sent Mousqueton to tell Planchet that his master was requested, the instant he left the trenches, to come to the quarters of the Musketeers.

My Lady, as Athos had foreseen, on finding the two men that awaited her, made no difficulty in following them; she had had for an instant an inclination to be reconducted to the Cardinal, and relate everything to him; but a revelation on her part, would bring about a revelation on the part of Athos; she might say that Athos had hung her, but then Athos would tell that she was branded; she thought it was best to preserve silence, to set off discreetly, to accomplish her difficult mission with her usual skill; and then, all things being performed to the satisfaction of the Cardinal, to come back and claim her vengeance.

In consequence, after having travelled all night, at eight o'clock she had embarked; and at nine the vessel, which, with letters-of-marque from the Cardinal, was supposed to be sailing for Bayonne, raised anchor, and steered its course towards England.

CHAPTER XLIV.

THE SAINT-GERVAIS BASTION.

On arriving at the lodging of his three friends, d'Artagnan found them assembled in the same chamber; Athos was meditating, Porthos was twisting his mustaches, Aramis was reading prayers in a dainty little prayer-book, bound in blue velvet.

"Well!" said he, "gentlemen! I hope what you have to tell me is worth the trouble; or else, I warn you, I will not pardon you for making me come here instead of getting a little rest, after a night spent in taking and dismantling a bastion. Ah! why were you not there, gentlemen; it was warm work!"

"We were in a place where it was not very cold!" replied Porthos, giving his mustache a twist which was peculiar to him.

"Hush!" said Athos.

"Oh! oh!" said d'Artagnan, comprehending the slight frown of the Musketeer; "it appears there is something fresh abroad."

"Aramis," said Athos, "you went to breakfast the day before yesterday, at the auberge of the Parpaillot, I believe?"

"Yes."

"I want to know if you were left alone, and nobody interrupted you."

"Why, I think there were not many intruders; yes, Athos, I know what you mean, we shall do very comfortably at the Parpaillot."

"Let us go to the Parpaillot, then; for here the walls are like sheets of paper."

They arrived at the Parpaillot: it was seven o'clock in the morning, and daylight began to appear: the three friends ordered breakfast, and went into a room in which, the host said, they would not be disturbed.

Unfortunately, the hour was badly chosen for a private conference; the morning drum had just been beaten; every one shook off the drowsiness of night, and, to dispel the humid morning air, came to take a drop: dragoons, Swiss, guards, Musketeers, light-horsemen, succeeded each other with a rapidity which might answer for the purpose of the host very well, but agreed badly with the views of the four friends. Thus they replied very curtly to the salutations, healths, and jokes of their companions.

"I see how it will be," said Athos; "we shall get into some pretty quarrel or other, and we don't stand in need of one just now. D'Artagnan, tell us what sort of a night you have had, and we will describe ours afterwards."

"Ah! yes," said a light-horseman, with a glass of brandy in his hand, which he degustated slowly; "ah! yes! I hear you gentlemen of the guards have been in the trenches to-night, and that you did not get much the best of the Rochellais."

D'Artagnan looked at Athos to know if he ought to reply to this intruder, who mixed unasked in their conversation.

"Well!" said Athos, "don't you hear M. de Busigny, who does you the honor to ask you a question? Relate what has passed during the night, since these gentlemen desire it."

"Have you not taken a bastion?" said a Swiss, who was drinking rum out of a beer glass.

"Yes, monsieur," said d'Artagnan, bowing, "we have had that honor: we even, as you may have heard, introduced a barrel of powder under one of the angles, which, in blowing up, made a very pretty breach; without reckoning that, as the bastion was not of yesterday, all the rest of the building was much shaken."

"And what bastion is it?" asked a dragoon, with his sabre run through a goose, which he was taking to be cooked.

"The bastion Saint-Gervais," replied d'Artagnan, "from behind which the Rochellais annoyed our workmen."

"Was the affair hot?"

"Yes, moderately so; we lost five men, and the Rochellais eight or ten."

"Dunder!" said the Swiss.

"But it is probable," said the light-horseman, "that they will send pioneers this morning to reinstate the bastion."

"Yes, that's probable," said d'Artagnan.

"Gentlemen," said Athos, "I have a wager to propose. Well, Monsieur de Busigny, I will bet you," said Athos, "that my three companions, MM. Porthos, Aramis, and d'Artagnan, and myself, will go and breakfast in the bastion Saint-Gervais, and we will remain there an hour, by the watch, whatever the enemy may do to dislodge us."

"Faith! gentlemen," said Porthos, turning round upon his chair, and twisting his mustache, "that's a fair bet, I hope."

"I take it," said M. de Busigny; "now let us fix the stake."

"Why, you are four, gentlemen," said Athos, "and we are four; a dinner for eight,—will that do?"

"Capitally," replied M. de Busigny.

"Perfectly well," said the dragoon.

"That's just the thing," said the Swiss. The fourth auditor, who during all this conversation had played a mute part, made a sign of the head to show that he acquiesced in the proposition.

"The breakfast for these gentlemen is ready," said the host.

"Well, bring it in," said Athos.

The host obeyed. Athos called Grimaud, pointed to a large basket which lay in a corner, and made a sign to him to wrap the viands up in the napkins.

Grimaud perceived that it was to be a breakfast on the grass, took the basket, packed up the viands, added the bottles, and then took the basket on his arm.

"But where are you going to eat my breakfast?" said the host.

"Of what consequence is that to you, if you are paid for it?" said Athos, and he threw two pistoles majestically on to the table.

"Shall I give you the change, mon officier?" said the host.

"No, only add two bottles of champagne, and the difference will be for the napkins."

The host had not quite so good a bargain as he at first hoped for, but he made amends by slipping in two bottles of Anjou wine instead of two bottles of champagne.

Bowing to all the astonished persons present, the young men took the road to the St. Gervais Bastion, followed by Grimaud, who carried the basket, ignorant of where he was going, but, in the passive obedience which Athos had taught him, not even thinking of asking.

As long as they were within the camp, the four friends did not exchange one word; besides, they were followed by the curious, who hearing of the wager were anxious to know how they would come out of it. But when once they had passed the line of circumvallation, and found themselves in the open plain, d'Artagnan thought it was time to demand an explanation.

"And now, my dear Athos," said he, "do me the kindness to tell me where we are going?"

"Why, you see, plainly enough, we are going to the bastion to breakfast there."

"But why did we not breakfast at the Parpaillot?"

"Because we have some very important matters to communicate to each other, and it is impossible to talk five minutes in that inn without being annoyed by all those importunate fellows, who keep coming in, saluting, and addressing you; yonder," said Athos, pointing to the bastion, "they will, at least, not come and disturb us. We have made a wager, which could not be foreseen, and of which I defy any one to guess the true cause; we are going, in order to win it, to remain an hour in the bastion. We either shall be or shall not be attacked. If we are not, we shall have all the time to talk, and nobody will hear us, for, I will answer for it the walls of the bastion have no ear; if we are attacked, we will talk of our affairs just the same, and whilst defending ourselves, we shall cover ourselves with glory. You see that everything is to our advantage."

"Oh! Athos!" said Aramis, "truly, thou art a great man."

Porthos bowed in sign of agreement. D'Artagnan alone did not appear to be quite satisfied.

Grimaud, no doubt, shared the misgivings of the young man, for, seeing that they continued to advance towards the bastion, a circumstance which he had not at first suspected, he pulled his master by the skirt of his coat.

"Where are we going?" asked he by a gesture.

Athos pointed to the bastion.

"But," said the still silent Grimaud, in the usual dialect current between him and his master, "we shall leave our skins behind us."

Athos raised his eyes, and pointed with his finger towards heaven.

Grimaud put his basket on the ground, and sat down with a shake of the head.

Athos took a pistol from his belt, looked to see if it was properly primed, cocked it, and placed the muzzle close to Grimaud's ear.

Grimaud was on his legs again, as if by magic. Athos then made him a sign to take up his basket, and to walk on first. Grimaud obeyed. All that Grimaud gained by this pantomime of a minute, was to pass from the rear-guard to the vanguard.

When arrived at the bastion, the four friends turned round.

More than three hundred soldiers of all kinds were assembled at the gate of the camp; and in a separate group might be distinguished M. de Busigny, the dragoon, the Swiss, and the fourth wagerer.

Athos took off his hat, placed it on the end of his sword, and waved it in the air.

All the spectators returned him his salute, accompanying this politeness with a loud cheer, which was audible at the bastion.

After which, they all four disappeared in the bastion, Grimaud having preceded them.

CHAPTER XLV.

THE COUNCIL OF THE MUSKETEERS.

As Athos had foreseen, the bastion was only occupied by a dozen of dead bodies, French and Rochellais.

"Gentlemen," said Athos, who had assumed the command of the expedition, "whilst Grimaud is laying out the breakfast, let us begin by collecting the guns and cartridges together; we can talk whilst performing that necessary task. These gentlemen," added he, pointing to the bodies, "cannot hear us. How many guns, gentlemen?"

"Twelve," replied Aramis.

"How many cartridges?"

"A hundred."

"That's quite as many as we shall want; let us load the guns."

The four Musketeers went to work, and as they were loading the last musket, Grimaud announced that the breakfast was ready.

Athos replied, still by gestures, that that was well, and indicated to Grimaud, by pointing to a turret, that he was to stand as sentinel. Only, to alleviate the tediousness of the duty, Athos allowed him to take a loaf, two cutlets, and a bottle of wine.

"And now, to table," said Athos.

The four friends sat down upon the ground, with their legs crossed, like Turks or tailors.

"And now," said d'Artagnan, "as there is no longer a fear of being overheard, I hope you are going to let me into this momentous secret."

"I hope, at the same time, to procure you amusement and glory, gentlemen," said Athos. "I have induced you to take a very pleasant walk; here is a delicious breakfast, and five hundred persons yonder, as you may see through the loop-holes, taking us for heroes or madmen, two classes of imbeciles sufficiently resembling each other."

"But the secret! the secret!" said d'Artagnan.

"The secret is," said Athos, "that I saw My Lady last night."

D'Artagnan was lifting a glass to his lips, but at the name his hand shook so, that he was obliged to put the glass on the ground again, for fear of spilling the contents.

"You saw your wi——"

"Hush!" interrupted Athos, "you forget, d'Artagnan, you forget that these gentlemen are not so initiated as you are in my family affairs. I have seen My Lady."

"Where?" demanded d'Artagnan.

"Within two leagues of this place, at the Red Dovecote Inn."

"In that case, I am a lost man," said d'Artagnan.

"Not quite so yet," replied Athos; "for by this time she must have left the shores of France."

D'Artagnan breathed again.

"But, after all," asked Porthos, "who is My Lady?"

"A very delightful woman!" said Athos, sipping a glass of

sparkling wine. "A scoundrel of a host!" cried he, "he has given us Anjou wine instead of champagne, and fancies we know no better! Yes," continued he, "a very charming woman, who entertained kind views towards our friend d'Artagnan, who, on his part, has given her some offence for which she endeavored to revenge herself, a month ago, by having him killed by two musket shots; a week ago by trying to poison him; and yesterday, by demanding his head of the Cardinal."

"What!" cried d'Artagnan, pale with terror.

"Yes, that is as true as the Gospel," said Porthos; "I heard her with my own ears."

"So did I," said Aramis.

"Then," said d'Artagnan, letting his arm fall, as if overcome by discouragement, "it is useless to struggle any longer; I may as well blow my brains out, and put an end to the matter at once."

"That's the last folly to be committed," said Athos, "seeing that that is the only one for which there is no remedy."

"But I can never escape," said d'Artagnan, "with such enemies. First, there is my unknown man of Meung; then De Wardes, to whom I have given three wounds; next My Lady, whose secret I have discovered; and last and worst the Cardinal, whose vengeance I have balked."

"Well," said Athos, "that only makes four; and we are four—one to one."

"Pardieu! if we may believe the signs Grimaud is making, we are about to have to do with a very different number of folks."

"What's the matter, Grimaud?" said Athos. "Considering the seriousness of the circumstance, I permit you to speak, my friend; but be laconic, I beg. What do you see?"

"A troop of twenty men. Sixteen pioneers, four soldiers, at five hundred paces."

"Good! We have just time to finish this fowl, and to drink one glass of wine to your health, d'Artagnan."

"To your health," repeated Porthos and Aramis.

"Well, then, to my health! although I am very much afraid that your good wishes will not be of great service to me."

"Bah!" said Athos, "God is great, as the followers of Mahomet say; and the future is in His hands."

Then, swallowing the contents of his glass, which he put down close to him, Athos arose carelessly, took the musket next to him, and drew near to one of the loop-holes.

Porthos, Aramis, and d'Artagnan followed his example. As to Grimaud, he received orders to place himself behind the four friends, in order to reload their weapons.

At the expiration of a minute the troop appeared; they advanced along a sort of narrow channel of the trench, which kept up a means of communication between the bastion and the city.

"Hang it!" said Athos, "it was hardly worth while to distrub ourselves for twenty fellows, armed with pickaxes, mattocks and

shovels! Grimaud had only need have made them a sign to go away, and I am convinced they would have left us alone."

"I doubt that," replied d'Artagnan; "for they are advancing very resolutely. Besides, in addition to the pioneers, there are four soldiers and a brigadier armed with muskets. What the devil are you going about, Athos?—you will be shot!"

But Athos took no heed of his advice; and, mounting on the breach, with his musket in one hand, and his hat in the other:

"Gentlemen," said he, addressing the soldiers and the pioneers, who, astonished at his appearance, stopped at fifty paces from the bastion, and bowing courteously to them—"gentlemen, a few friends and myself are about to breakfast in this bastion. Now, you know nothing is more disagreeable than being disturbed when one is at breakfast. We request you, then, if you really have business here, to wait till we have finished our repast, or to come again a short time hence; unless, which would be far better, you form the salutary resolution to quit the side of the rebels, and come and drink with us to the health of the King of France."

"Take care, Athos!" cried d'Artagnan; "don't you see they are preparing to fire?"

"Yes, yes," said Athos; "but they are only militia,—very bad marksmen, sure not to hit me."

In fact, at the same instant, four shots were fired, and the balls were flattened against the wall round Athos, but not one hit him.

Four shots replied to them, almost instantaneously, but much better aimed than those of the aggressors; three soldiers fell dead; and one of the pioneers was wounded.

"Grimaud," said Athos, still on the breach, "another musket!"

Grimaud immediately obeyed. On their part, the three friends had reloaded their arms; another discharge followed the second, the brigadier and two pioneers fell dead; the rest of the troop took to flight.

"Now, gentlemen, a sortie!" cried Athos.

And the four friends rushed out of the fort, gained the field of battle, picked up the four soldiers' muskets and the half-pike of the brigadier; and, convinced that the fugitives would not stop till they got to the city, turned again towards the bastion, bearing with them the trophies of their victory.

"Reload the muskets, Grimaud," said Athos, "and we, gentlemen, will go on with our breakfast, and resume our conversation. Where were we?"

"You were saying," said d'Artagnan, "that after having demanded my head of the Cardinal, My Lady had left the shores of France. Where is she going to?" added he, considerably interested.

"She is going into England," said Athos, "with a view of assassinating the Duke of Buckingham, or causing him to be assassinated."

D'Artagnan uttered an exclamation of surprise and astonishment. "But this is infamous!" cried he.

"As to that," said Athos, "I beg you to believe that I care very little about it. Now you have done, Grimaud, take our brigadier's half-pike, tie a napkin to it, and plant it at the top of our bastion, that these rebels of Rochellais may see that they have to deal with brave and loyal soldiers of the King."

Grimaud obeyed without replying An instant afterwards, the white flag was floating over the heads of the four friends; a thunder of applause saluted its appearance: half the camp was at the barrier.

"But why do you care so little whether Buckingham be killed or not? The Duke is our friend."

"The Duke is an Englishman, the Duke is fighting against us; let her do what she likes with the Duke; I care no more about him than an empty bottle."

And Athos threw fifteen paces from him an empty bottle, from which he had poured the last drop into his glass.

"Ay, but stop a minute, I will not give up Buckingham thus," said d'Artagnan, "he gave us some very fine horses."

"And, moreover, very handsome saddles," said Porthos, who at the moment wore the lace of his on his cloak.

"Besides," said Aramis, "God desires the conversion, and not the death, of a sinner."

"*Amen!*" said Athos, "and we will return to that subject presently, if such be your pleasure; but that which, for the moment, engaged my attention most earnestly, and I am sure you will understand me, d'Artagnan, was the getting from this woman a kind of signed carte-blanche, which she had extorted from the Cardinal, and by means of which she could with impunity get rid of you and perhaps of us."

And he took the invaluable paper from the pocket of his uniform.

D'Artagnan unfolded it with a hand the trembling of which he did not even attempt to conceal, and read what was absolution in all its forms.

"That paper must be torn to pieces," said d'Artagnan, who fancied he read in it his sentence of death.

"On the contrary," said Athos, "it must be preserved carefully; I would not give this paper for as many gold pieces as would cover it."

"And what is she going to do now?" asked the young man.

"Why," replied Athos, carelessly, "she is probably going to write to the Cardinal that a cursed Musketeer, named Athos, has taken her *protection order* from her by force; she will advise him in the same letter to get rid of his two friends, Aramis and Porthos, at the time he disposes of him. The Cardinal will remember that these are the same men that have so often crossed his path; and then, some fine morning, he will arrest d'Artagnan, and for fear he should feel lonely, he will send us to keep him company in the Bastile."

"It appears to me you are making but very dull jokes, friend Athos," said Porthos.

"I am not joking."

"Do you know," said Porthos, "that to twist that confounded lady's neck would be a less sin than to twist those of these poor devils of Huguenots, who have committed no other crimes than singing these Psalms in French that we sing in Latin? Fortunately, she is a good way off, for I confess she would make me very uncomfortable if she were here."

"She makes me uncomfortable in England as well as in France," said Athos.

"She makes me uncomfortable wherever she is," said d'Artagnan.

"But, when you had her in your power, why did you not drown her, or strangle her, or hang her?" said Porthos, "it is only the dead that don't come back again."

"You think so, do you, Porthos?" replied the Musketeer, with a sad smile, which d'Artagnan alone understood.

"I have an idea," said d'Artagnan.

"What is it?" said the Musketeers.

"To arms!" cried Grimaud.

The young men sprang up, and seized their muskets.

This time a small troop advanced, consisting of from twenty to five-and-twenty men; but they were no longer pioneers, they were soldiers of the garrison.

"Shall we return to the camp?" said Porthos, "I don't think the sides are equal."

"Impossible, for three reasons," replied Athos—"the first is that we have not finished breakfast; the second is, that we have still some very important things to talk about; and the third is, that it yet wants ten minutes before the hour will be elapsed."

"Well, then," said Aramis, "we must form a plan of battle."

"That's very simple," replied Athos; "as soon as the enemy are within musket-shot we must fire upon them; if they continue to advance, we must fire again as long as we have loaded guns; if such as then remain of the troop persist in coming to the assault, we will allow the besiegers to go into the ditch, and then we will push down upon their heads that strip of wall which seems only to keep its perpendicular by a miracle."

"Bravo!" cried Porthos; "decidedly, Athos, you were born to be a general, and the Cardinal, who fancies himself a great captain, is a fool to you."

The four muskets made one report, but four men fell.

The drum immediately beat, and the little troop advanced in charging step.

Then the shots were repeated, without regularity, but always aimed with the same correctness. Nevertheless, as if they had been aware of the numerical weakness of the friends, the Rochellais continued to advance in quick time.

Upon every three shots at least two men fell; but the march of those left untouched was not slackened.

When arrived at the foot of the bastion, there was still more than a dozen of the enemy; a last discharge welcomed them,

but did not stop them; they jumped into the ditch, and prepared to scale the breach.

"Now, my friends," said Athos, "finish them at a blow: to the wall! to the wall!"

And the four friends, seconded by Grimaud, pushed with the barrels of their muskets an enormous sheet of the wall, which bent over as if acted upon by the wind, and, becoming detached from its base, fell with a horrible crash into the ditch. Then a fearful cry was heard, a cloud of dust mounted towards heaven, —and all was over!

"Can we have destroyed them all, from the first to the last?" said Athos.

"It appears so," said d'Artagnan.

"No," cried Porthos; "there go three or four, limping away."

In fact, three or four of these unfortunate men, covered with dirt and blood, were flying along the hollow way, and at length regained the city: these were all that were left of the little troop.

Athos looked at his watch.

"Gentlemen," said he, "we have been here an hour, and our wager is won; but we will be fair players: besides, d'Artagnan has not told us his idea yet."

And the Musketeer, with his usual coolness, went and reseated himself before the remains of the breakfast.

"Well," said d'Artagnan, "I will go into England a second time; I will go and find M. Buckingham."

"You shall not do that, d'Artagnan," said Athos, coolly. "At that period M. de Buckingham was an ally, and not an enemy. What you now contemplate doing would amount to treason."

D'Artagnan perceived the force of this reasoning, and was silent.

"But," said Porthos, "I think I have an idea, in my turn. I will ask leave of absence of M. de Treville, on some pretext or other, which you must find out, as I am not very clever at pretexts. My Lady does not know me; I will get access to her without her suspecting me, and when I catch my beauty alone, I will strangle her."

"Well," replied Athos, "I am not far from approving the idea of M. Porthos."

"For shame!" said Aramis—"kill a woman? No, listen to me; I have the best idea. We must acquaint the Queen. I know a clever person at Tours——"

Aramis stopped on seeing Athos smile.

"Well, do you not adopt this means, Athos?" said d'Artagnan.

"I do not reject it altogether," said Athos; "but I wish to remind Aramis that he cannot quit the camp, and that nobody but one of ourselves is safe; that two hours after the messenger has set out, all the capuchins, all the alguazils, all the black caps of the cardinal, will know your letter by heart and you and your clever person will be arrested."

"Without reckoning that the Queen would save M. de Buckingham, but would take no heed of us."

"Gentlemen," said d'Artagnan, "what Porthos says is full of sense."

"Ah, ah! but what's going on in the city yonder?" said Athos.

"They are beating the general alarm."

The four friends listened, and all plainly heard the sound of the drum.

"You will see, they are going to send a whole regiment against us," said Porthos.

"Let it come," said Athos. "It is a quarter of an hour's journey from hence to the city, consequently a quarter of an hour's journey from the city hither; that is more than time enough for us to devise a plan. If we go from this place, we shall never find another so suitable. Ah! stop! I have it, gentlemen—the right idea has just occurred to me."

Athos made a sign for his lackey to draw near.

"Grimaud," said Athos, pointing to the bodies which lay under the wall of the bastion, take those gentlemen, set them up against the wall, put their hats upon their heads, and their guns in their hands."

"Oh, the great man!" cried d'Artagnan; "I comprehend now."

"And do you comprehend, Grimaud?" said Aramis.

Grimaud made a nod.

"That's all that's necessary," cried Athos; "now for my idea. This lady—creature—demon, has a brother-in-law, as I think you have told me, d'Artagnan?"

"Lord Winter."

"Where is he now?"

"He returned to London at the first rumor of the war."

"Well, that's just the man we want," said Athos; "it is him we must warn. We will have him informed that his sister-in-law is on the point of having someone assassinated, and we beg of him not to lose sight of her. There is in London, I hope, some establishment like the Magdalen Prison-Hospital, eh? He must place his sister in one, and we shall be in peace."

"Yes," said d'Artagnan, "until she gets out again."

"Dash it all!" said Athos, "you require too much, d'Artagnan; I have given you all I had, and I beg leave to tell you that that is the bottom of my sack."

"But I think it would be still better," said Aramis, "to inform the Queen and Winter at the same time."

"Yes; but who is to carry the letter to Tours, and who to London?"

"I answer for Bazin," said Aramis.

"And I for Planchet," said d'Artagnan.

"Ay," said Porthos, "if we cannot leave the camp, our lackeys may."

"To be sure they may, and this very day we will write the letters," said Aramis; "give them money and set them forward."

"We will give them money?" replied Athos. "Have you any money, then?"

The four friends looked at each other, and a cloud came over their brows lately so cheerful.

"Quick!" cried d'Artagnan, "I see black points and red points moving yonder. What! did you talk of a regiment, Athos? It is an army!"

"In faith!" said Athos, "I have nothing more to say against a retreat, we betted upon one hour, and we have stayed an hour and a half. Nothing can be said; let us be off, gentlemen?"

Grimaud went on before with the basket; the four friends followed, at about ten paces behind him.

"What the devil shall we do now, gentlemen?" cried Athos.

"Have you forgotten anything?" said Aramis.

"The white flag! s'death! we must not leave a flag in the hands of the enemy, even if that flag be but a napkin."

And Athos ran back to the bastion, mounted the platform, and bore off the flag; but as the Rochellais were arrived within musket range, they opened a terrible fire upon this man, who appeared to expose himself for pleasure's sake.

But Athos might be said to bear a charmed life: the balls passed and whistled all round him; not one hit him.

Athos waved his flag, turning his back to the city guards, and saluting those of the camp. On both sides loud cries arose—on the one side cries of anger, on the other, cries of enthusiasm.

A second discharge followed the first, and three balls, by passing through it, made the napkin really a flag. Cries were heard from the camp, "Down! come down!"

Athos came down; his friends, who anxiously awaited him, saw him return with joy.

"Come along, Athos, come along!" cried d'Artagnan; "now we have found everything except money, it would be stupid to be killed."

But Athos continued to march majestically, whatever observations his companions made; and they, finding their observations useless, regulated their pace by his.

Grimaud and his basket were far in advance, out of the reach of the balls.

At the end of an instant, a furious firing was heard.

"What's that?" asked Porthos, "what are they firing at now? I hear no balls, and I see nobody!"

"They are firing upon Grimaud's dead company," replied Athos. But the dead cannot return their fire."

"Certainly not; they will then fancy it is an ambuscade, they will deliberate, and by the time they have found out the joke we shall be out of the reach of their balls. That renders it useless to get a pleurisy by too much haste."

"Oh, I comprehend now," said the astonished Porthos.

"That's good," said Athos, shrugging his shoulders.

On their part, the French, on seeing the four friends return at the common marching step, uttered cries of enthusiasm.

At length a fresh discharge was heard, and this time the balls came rattling among the stones around the friends, and whistling sharply in their ears. The Rochellais had at last taken possession of the bastion.

"These Rochellais are bungling fellows," said Athos; "how many have we killed of them—a dozen?"

"Or fifteen."

"How many did we crush under the wall?"

"Eight or ten."

"And in exchange for all that not even a scratch! Ah! but what is the matter with your hand, d'Artagnan? It bleeds, seemingly."

"Oh, it's nothing," said d'Artagnan, "my fingers were caught between two stones, the wall, and my ring, and the skin was broken."

"That comes of wearing diamonds, my master," said Athos, disdainfully.

"Ah, to be sure," cried Porthos, "there is a diamond; why the devil, then, do we plague ourselves about money, when there is a diamond? Let us sell it."

"But," said d'Artagnan, "it is the Queen's diamond."

"The stronger reason why it should be sold," replied Athos: "the Queen saving M. de Buckingham, her lover, nothing more just; the Queen saving us, her friends, nothing more moral; let us sell the diamond. What says the priest? I don't ask Porthos; his opinion has been given."

"Why, I think," said Aramis, coloring, as usual, "that his ring not coming from a mistress, and, consequently, not being a love-token, d'Artagnan may sell it."

"Well, then," said d'Artagnan gayly, "let us sell the diamond, and say no more about it."

The fusillade continued; but the friends were out of reach, and the Rochellais only fired for the discharge of their consciences.

"By my faith! it was time that idea came into Porthos's head—here we are at the camp; therefore, gentlemen, not a word more of this affair. We are observed—they are coming to meet us, we shall be borne in in triumph."

In fact, as we have said, the whole camp was in commotion. More than two thousand persons had assisted, as at a play, at this fortunate but wild undertaking of the four friends, of which they were far from suspecting the real motive. Nothing was heard but shouts of "Long live the Musketeers! the Gentlemen of the Guards forever!"

Busigny was the first to come and shake Athos by the hand, and acknowledge that the wager was lost. The dragoon and the Swiss followed him, and all their comrades followed them. There was nothing but congratulations, pressures of the hand, and embraces; there was no end to the inextinguishable laughter at the Rochellais. The tumult at length became so great that the Cardinal fancied there must be a riot, and sent his captain of guards to inquire what was going on.

"Well?" asked the Cardinal, on seeing La Houdiniere return.

"Well, Monseigneur," replied the latter, "three Musketeers and a guardsman laid a wager with M. de Busigny, that they would go and breakfast in the Bastion St. Gervais, and whilst breakfasting, they held it for two hours against the enemy, and have killed I don't know how many Rochellais."

"Did you inquire the names of those three Musketeers?"

"MM. Athos, Porthos, and Aramis."

"Still my three brave fellows!" murmured the Cardinal. "And the guard?"

"M. d'Artagnan."

My young scapegrace again. Positively, these four men must be mine."

That same evening, the Cardinal spoke to M. de Treville of the exploit of the morning, the talk of the whole camp. Treville, who had received the account of the adventure from the mouths of the heroes, related it in all its details to his Eminence, not forgetting the episode of the napkin.

"That's well, M. de Treville," said the Cardinal; "pray let that napkin be sent to me. I will have three fleur-de-lis embroidered on it in gold, and will give it to your company as a standard."

"Monseigneur," said M. de Treville, "that will hardly be doing justice to the guards; M. d'Artagnan is not mine; he serves under M. Desessarts."

"Well, then, take him," said the Cardinal; "when four men are so much attached to each other, it is only fair that they should serve in the same company."

D'Artagnan was beside himself with joy. We know that the dream of his life had been to become a Musketeer. The three friends were likewise greatly delighted.

"Faith!" said d'Artagnan to Athos, "that was a triumphant idea of yours! As you said, we have acquired glory, and were enabled to carry on a conversation of the greatest importance."

"Which we can resume now without anybody suspecting us, for, with the help of God, we shall henceforth pass for Cardinalists."

That evening, d'Artagnan went to present his compliments to M. Desessarts, and inform him of his promotion.

Desessarts, who esteemed d'Artagnan, made him offers of service, as this change would bring on expenses for equipment.

D'Artagnan respectfully declined, but thinking the opportunity a good one, he begged him to have the diamond he put into his hand valued, as he wished to turn it into money.

The next day, by two o'clock, M. Desessarts' valet came to d'Artagnan's lodging, and gave him a bag containing seven thousand livres.

This was the price of the Queen's diamond.

CHAPTER XLVI.

A FAMILY MATTER.

Athos had discovered the name: "a family matter." A family matter was not subject to the investigation of the Cardinal; it concerned nobody; people might employ themselves in one before all the world.

Aramis had discovered the instruments: the lackeys.

Porthos had discovered the means: the diamond.

D'Artagnan alone had discovered nothing; he, ordinarily the most inventive of the four: but it must be also said that the bare name of My Lady paralyzed him.

Nay, we are mistaken; he had discovered a purchaser for his diamond.

After breakfast, it was agreed that they should meet again in the evening at Athos's lodgings, and would there terminate the affair.

D'Artagnan passed the day in exhibiting his Musketeer's uniform in every street of the camp.

In the evening, at the appointed hour, the four friends met; there only remained three things to be decided upon:—

What they should write to My Lady's brother;

What they should write to the clever person at Tours;

And which should be the lackeys to carry the letters.

"Gentlemen," said Aramis, "the principal question is not to know which of the four lackeys is the most discreet, the strongest, the cleverest, or the most brave; the matter is to know which loves money the best."

"What Aramis says is very sensible," replied Athos; "we must speculate upon the faults of people, and not upon their virtues. Priest, you are a great moralist!"

"Doubtless," said Aramis; "for we not only require to be well served, in order to succeed, but, moreover, not to fail; for, in case of failure, heads are in question, not for our lackeys——"

"Speak lower, Aramis," said Athos.

"That's correct; not for the lackeys," resumed Aramis, "but for the masters! Are our lackeys sufficiently devoted to us to risk their lives for us? No."

"Faith!" said d'Artagnan, "I would almost answer for Planchet."

"Well, my dear friend, add to his natural devotedness a good sum of money, and then, instead of answering for him once, answer for him twice."

"Why, good God! you will be deceived just the same," said Athos, who was an optimist when things were concerned, and a pessimist when men were in question. "They will promise everything for the sake of money, and on the road fear will prevent them from acting. Once taken, they will be pressed; when pressed, they will confess everything. What the devil, we are not children! Go to England" (Athos lowered his voice)

"all France (covered with the spies and creatures of the Cardinal) must be crossed; a pass for embarkation must be obtained; and the party must be acquainted with English, to inquire the way to London. Really, I think the thing is very difficult!"

"Not at all," cried d'Artagnan, who was anxious the matter should be accomplished; "on the contrary, I think it is very easy. It would be, no doubt. Parbleu! if we write to Lord Winter about affairs of vast importance, of the Cardinal's atrocities——"

"Speak lower!" said Athos.

"Of the intrigues and secrets of state," continued d'Artagnan, complying with the recommendation; "there can be no doubt we shall be all broken on the wheel; but, for God's sake do not forget, as you yourself said, Athos, that we only write to him concerning a family matter; that we only write him to entreat that as soon as My Lady arrives in London, he will put it out of her power to injure us. I will write to him."

"My dear d'Artagnan, you will never make anything but a very bad secretary. Handle the musket and the sword, my dear fellow; you will come off splendidly at those two exercises; but pass the pen over to the Abbe, that's his province."

"Ay, ay," said Porthos, "pass the pen over to Aramis, who writes theses in Latin."

"Well, so be it," said d'Artagnan, "draw up this note for us, Aramis; but, by our holy father the pope! be concise, for I shall prune you in my turn, I warn you."

"I ask no better," said Aramis, with that ingenuous air of confidence which every poet has in himself; "but let me be properly acquainted with the subject."

D'Artagnan and Athos looked at each other for some time in silence. At length, Athos, after apparently serious reflection, and becoming more pale than usual, made a sign of assent to d'Artagnan, who by it understood he was at liberty to speak.

"Well, this is what you have to say," said d'Artagnan: "'My lord, your sister-in-law is an infamous woman, who has wished to have you killed, that she might inherit your wealth. But she could not marry your brother, being already married in France, and having been——'" D'Artagnan stopped, as if seeking for the word, and looking at Athos.

"Repudiated by her first husband."

"Because she had been branded," continued d'Artagnan.

"And does the husband of this frightful creature still live?" said Aramis.

"He still lives."

"Are you quite sure of it?"

"I am he."

There was a moment of cold silence, during which every one was affected, according to his nature.

"This time," said Athos, first breaking the silence, "d'Artagnan has given us an excellent programme, and the letter must be written at once."

"The devil! you are right, Athos," said Aramis, "and it is rather a difficult matter. The Chancellor himself would be puzzled how to write such a letter, and yet the Chancellor draws up a report very agreeably. Never mind! be silent, I will try."

Aramis accordingly took the pen, reflected for a few moments, wrote eight or ten lines, in a charming little female hand, and then, with a voice soft and slow, as if each word had been scrupulously weighed, he read the following:

MILORD:—The person who writes these few lines had the honor of crossing swords with you in the little enclosure of the Rue d'Enfer. As you have several times since declared yourself the friend of that person, he thinks it is his duty to respond to that friendship by sending you important advice. Twice you have nearly been the victim of a near relation whom you believe to be your heir, because you are ignorant that before she contracted a marriage in England, she was already married in France. But the third time, which is this, you may succumb. Your relation left La Rochelle for England during the night. Watch her arrival, for she has great and terrible projects. If you require to know positively what she is capable of, read her past history upon her left shoulder.

"Well, now that will do wonderfully well," said Athos; "really, my dear Aramis, you have the pen of a secretary of state. Lord Winter will now be upon his guard, if the letter should reach him; and even if it should fall into the hands of the Cardinal, we shall not be compromised. But as the lackey who goes may make us believe he has been to London and may stop at Chatelherault, let us give him only half the sum promised him with the letter, with an agreement that he shall have the other half in exchange for the reply. Have you the diamond?" continued Athos.

"I have what is still better: I have the value of it," said d'Artagnan, throwing the bag upon the table. "Seven thousand livres, in louis of twelve francs."

"Seven thousand!" cried Porthos; "that poor little diamond worth seven thousand?"

"It appears so," said Athos, "since here they are; I don't suppose that our friend has added any of his on to the amount."

"But gentlemen, in all this," said d'Artagnan, "we do not think of the Queen. Let us take some heed of the welfare of her dear Buckingham. That is the least we owe her."

"That's true," said Athos, "but that falls to Aramis."

Aramis resumed his pen, reflected a little, and wrote the following lines, which he immediately submitted to the approbation of his friends:

MY DEAR COUSIN:—His Eminence, the Cardinal, whom God preserved for the happiness of France and the confusion of the enemies of the kingdom, is on the point of putting an end to the heretic rebellion of La Rochelle; it is probable that the succor of the English fleet will never even arrive in sight of the place; I will even venture to say that I am certain M. de Buckingham will be prevented from setting out by some great event. His Eminence is the most illustrious politician of times past, of times present, and probably of times to come. He would extinguish the sun, if the sun incommoded him. Give these happy tidings to your sister, my dear cousin. I have dreamed that that cursed Englishman was dead. I cannot

recollect whether it was by steel or by poison; only of this I am sure, I have dreamed he was dead, and you know my dreams never deceive me. Be assured, then, of seeing me soon return.

"Capital," cried Athos: "you are the king of poets, my dear Aramis; you speak like the Apocalypse, and you are as true as the Gospel. There is nothing now to do but to put the address to this letter."

"To Mademoiselle Michon, seamstress, Tours."

The three friends looked at each other and laughed: they were caught.

"Now," said Aramis, "you will please to understand, gentlemen, that Bazin alone can carry this letter to Tours; my cousin knows nobody but Bazin, and places confidence in nobody but him: any other person would fail. Besides, Bazin is ambitious and learned; Bazin has read history gentlemen, he knows that Sixtus Quintus became pope after having kept pigs; well! as he means to enter the Church at the same time as myself, he does not despair of becoming pope in his turn, or at least a Cardinal; you can understand that a man who has such views will never allow himself to be taken, or if taken, will undergo martyrdom rather than speak."

"Very well," said d'Artagnan, "I consent to Bazin, with all my heart, but grant me Planchet; My Lady had him one day turned out-of-doors, with sundry blows of a good stick, to accelerate his motions; now Planchet has an excellent memory, and I will be bound that sooner than relinquish any possible means of vengeance, he will allow himself to be beaten to death. If your affairs of Tours are your affairs, Aramis, those of London are mine. I request, then, that Planchet may be chosen, more particularly as he has already been to London with me, and knows how to speak very correctly, 'London, sir, if you please, and my master, Lord d'Artagnan;' with that, you may be satisfied, he can make his way, both going and returning."

"Well, then," said Athos, "it is agreed; Planchet and Bazin shall go: everything considered, I am not sorry to retain Grimaud; he is accustomed to my ways, and I am particular; yesterday's affair must have shaken him a little, his voyage would upset him quite."

Planchet was sent for, and instructions were given him; the matter had been named to him by d'Artagnan, who had, in the first place, pointed out the money to him, then the glory, and then the danger.

"I will carry the letter in the lining of my coat," said Planchet; "and if I am taken I will swallow it."

D'Artagnan looked at his friends, as if to say, "Well, what did I promise you?"

"Now," continued he, addressing Planchet, "you have eight days to get an interview with Lord de Winter, you have eight days to return in, in all sixteen days; if, on the sixteenth day after your departure, at eight o'clock in the evening, you are not here, no money, even if it be but five minutes past eight——"

"Then, master," said Planchet, "you ought to buy me a watch."

"Take this," said Athos, with his usual careless generosity, giving him his own, "and be a good lad. Remember, if you talk, if you babble, if you get drunk, you risk your master's head, who has so much confidence in your fidelity, and who answers for you. But remember, also, that if, by your fault, any evil happens to M. d'Artagnan, I will find you, wherever you may be, and that for the purpose of ripping up your belly."

"Oh, master!" said Planchet, humiliated by the suspicion, and, moreover, terrified at the calm air of the Musketeer.

"And I," said Porthos, rolling his large eyes, "remember, I will skin you alive."

"Oh! master!"

"And I," said Aramis, with his soft melodious voice, "remember that I will roast you at a slow fire like a savage."

"Ah! master!"

And Planchet began to weep: we will not venture to say whether it was from terror, created by the threats, or from tenderness, at seeing four friends so closely united.

D'Artagnan took his hand.

"Listen," said he to him; "when you have given the letter to Lord Winter, and he has read it, you will further say to him, 'Watch over the Duke of Buckingham, for they wish to assassinate him.' But this, Planchet, is so serious and important, that I have not informed my friends that I would intrust this secret to you; and, for a captain's commission, I would not write it."

"Be satisfied, master," said Planchet, "you shall see whether confidence can be placed in me or not."

And, mounted on an excellent horse, which he was to leave at the end of twenty leagues, to take the post, Planchet set off at a gallop, his spirits a little depressed by the triple promise made him by the Musketeers; but otherwise as light-hearted as possible.

Bazin set out the next day for Tours, and was allowed eight days to perform his commission in.

On the morning of the eighth day, Bazin, fresh as ever, and smiling according to his custom, entered the Parpaillot inn, as the four friends were sitting down to breakfast, saying, as had been agreed upon:

"M. Aramis, here is the answer from your cousin."

The four friends exchanged a joyful glance; half of the work was done; it is true, however, that it was the shortest and the most easy part.

Aramis, blushing in spite of himself, took the letter, which was in a large course hand and not particular for its orthography.

Aramis read the letter, and passed it to Athos.

"See what she writes to me, Athos," said he.

Athos cast a glance over the epistle, and to disperse all the suspicions that might have been created, read aloud:

MY COUSIN—My sister and I are skilful in interpreting dreams, and even entertain great fear of them; but of yours it may be said, I hope, every dream is an illusion. Adieu! Take care of yourself; and act so that we may, from time to time, hear you spoken of. AGLAE MICHON.

D'Artagnan, seeing Athos rise, did so likewise, took his arm and went out.

Porthos and Aramis remained behind to encounter the jokes of the dragoon and the Swiss.

As to Bazin, he went and lay down on a truss of straw; and as he had more imagination than the Swiss, he dreamed that Aramis, having become pope, adorned his head with a cardinal's hat.

But, as we have said, Bazin had not, by his fortunate return, removed more than a part of the uneasiness which weighed upon the four friends. The days of expectation are long, and d'Artagnan, in particular, would have wagered that the days were forty-four hours long. He forgot the necessary slowness of the navigation, he exaggerated the power of My Lady. He gave to this demon auxiliaries as supernatural as herself; at the least noise, he imagined that he was about to be arrested, and that Planchet was being brought back to be confronted with himself and his friends. Still further: his confidence in the worthy Picard, at one time so great, diminished day by day. This anxiety became so great, that it even extended to Aramis and Porthos. Athos alone remained impassible, as if no danger hovered over him, and as if he respired his usual atmosphere.

On the sixteenth day, in particular, these signs were so visible in d'Artagnan and his two friends, that they could not remain quiet in one place, and they wandered about, like ghosts, on the road by which Planchet was expected.

The evening came on slowly, but it did come; the buvettes were filled with drinkers. Athos, who had pocketed his share of the diamond, seldom quitted the Parpaillot. He had found in Busigny, who, by-the-by, had given them a magnificent dinner, a partner worthy of his company. They were playing together as usual, when seven o'clock struck; the patrols were heard passing to double the posts: at half-past seven the retreat was sounded.

"We are lost," said d'Artagnan in Athos's ear.

"You mean to say we have lost," said Athos, quietly, drawing four pistoles from his pocket, and throwing them on the table. "Come, gentlemen," said he, "they are beating the tattoo—to bed, to bed!"

And Athos went out of the Parpaillot, followed by d'Artagnan. Aramis came behind, giving his arm to Porthos. Aramis mumbled verses to himself, and Porthos, from time to time, pulled a hair or two from his moustache, in sign of despair.

But, all at once, a shadow appeared in the darkness, the outline of which was familiar to d'Artagnan, and a well-known voice said:

"Master, I have brought your cloak; it is chilly this evening."

"Planchet!" cried d'Artagnan, beside himself with joy.

"Planchet!" repeated Aramis and Porthos.

"Well, yes, Planchet, to be sure," said Athos, "what is there so astonishing in that? He promised to be back by eight o'clock, and eight is just now striking. Bravo! Planchet, you are a lad of your word, and if you ever leave your master, I will promise you a place in my service."

"Oh! no, never," said Planchet, "I will never leave M. d'Artagnan."

At the same time d'Artagnan felt that Planchet slipped a note into his hand.

At length they reached the tent, lit a lamp, and whilst Planchet stood at the entrance, that the four friends might not be surprised, d'Artagnan, with a trembling hand, broke the seal and opened the so anxiously expected letter.

It contained half a line in a hand perfectly British, and of a conciseness as perfectly Spartan.

"Thank you: Rest easy."

Athos took the letter from the hands of d'Artagnan, drew near to the lamp, set fire to it, and did not leave hold of it till it was reduced to ashes.

Then, calling Planchet,—

"Now, my lad," said he, "you may claim your seven hundred livres, but you did not run much risk with such a note as that."

"I am not to blame for having tried every means to compass it," said Planchet.

"Well!" cried d'Artagnan, "tell us all about it."

"Lord, master, that's a long job!"

"You are right, Planchet,' said Athos; "besides, the tattoo has been sounded, and we should be observed if we kept a light burning longer than the others."

"So be it," said d'Artagnan. "Go to bed, Planchet, and sleep soundly."

"Ma foi, monsieur! that will be the first time I have done so these sixteen days!"

"Or I either!" said d'Artagnan.

"Or I!" said Porthos.

"Or I!" said Aramis.

"Well! if I must tell you the truth!—or I!" said Athos.

CHAPTER XLVII.

FATALITY.

In the meantime, My Lady, drunk with passion, roaring on deck like a lioness, had been tempted to throw herself into the sea that she might regain the coast, for she could not get rid of the idea that she had been insulted by d'Artagnan, and

threatened by Athos, and had left France without being revenged of both. Nine days after leaving the Charente, pale with fatigue and vexation, My Lady saw only the blue coasts of Finisterre appear.

She calculated that to cross this corner of France and return to the Cardinal, it would take at least three days; and another day for landing, and it would make four; add these to the nine others, that would be thirteen days lost—thirteen days—during which so many important events might pass in London. She reflected, likewise, that the Cardinal would be furious at her return, and, consequently, would be more disposed to listen to the complaints made against her than to the accusations she brought against others.

She continued her voyage, and on the very day that Planchet embarked at Portsmouth for France, the messenger of his Eminence entered the port.

All the City was agitated by an extraordinary movement—four large vessels, recently built, had just been launched. Standing on the jetty, his clothes richly laced with gold, glittering, was as customary with him, with diamonds and precious stones, his hat ornamented with a white feather which drooped upon his shoulder, Buckingham was seen surrounded by a staff almost as brilliant as himself.

They entered the road, but as they drew near, in order to cast anchor, a little revenue cutter, formidably armed, approached the merchant vessel, and dropping its boat into the sea, the latter directed its course to the ladder. This boat contained an officer, a mate, and eight rowers—the officer alone got on board, where he was received with all the deference inspired by the uniform.

The officer conversed a few instants with the captain, and as if from that moment the vessel was under his command, he ordered a manœuvre which the crew executed immediately. Then the vessel resumed its course, still escorted by the little cutter, which sailed side by side with it, menacing it with the mouths of its six cannon; the boat followed in the wake of the ship, a speck near the enormous mass.

During the examination of My Lady by the officer, as may well be imagined, My Lady, on her part, was not less scrutinizing in her glances. But, however great was the power of this woman, with eyes of flame, in reading the hearts of those whose secrets she wished to divine, she met this time with a countenance of such impassibility, that no discovery followed her investigation. The officer who had stopped before her, and studied her with so much care, might have been about twenty-five or twenty-six; of pale complexion, with clear blue eyes, rather deeply set; his mouth, fine and well cut, remained motionless in its correct lines; his chin, strongly marked, denoted that strength of will which, in the ordinary British type, denotes mostly nothing but obstinacy; a brow a little receding, as is proper for poets, enthusiasts, and soldiers, was scarcely shaded by short thin hair,

which, like the beard which covered the lower part of his face, was of a beautiful, deep chestnut color.

When they entered the port, it was already night. The air they breathed was heavy, humid, and cold.

My Lady, that woman so courageous and firm, shivered in spite of herself.

The officer desired to have the lady's baggage pointed out to him, and ordered it to be placed in the boat: when this operation was completed, he invited her to descend by offering her his hand.

My Lady looked at this man, and hesitated.

"Who are you, sir," asked she, "who have the kindness to occupy yourself so particularly on my account?"

"You may perceive, madame, by my uniform, that I am an officer in the navy," replied the young man.

"But is it the custom for the officers of the navy to place themselves at the service of their countrywomen, when they land in a port of Great Britain, and carry their gallantry so far as to conduct them ashore?"

"Yes, My Lady, it is the custom, not from gallantry but prudence, that in time of war, foreigners are conducted to particular hotels, in order that they may remain under Government inspection until perfect information be obtained relative to them."

These words were pronounced with the most exact politeness, and the most perfect calmness. Nevertheless, they had not the power of convincing My Lady.

"But I am not a foreigner, sir," said she, with an accent as pure as ever was heard between Portsmouth and Manchester; "I am Lady Clarke, and this measure——"

"This measure is general, madame; and you will endeavor in vain to evade it."

"I will follow you, then, sir."

And accepting his hand, she commenced the descent of the ladder, at the foot of which the boat waited. The officer followed her. A large cloak was spread at the stern; the officer requested her to sit down upon this cloak, and placed himself beside her.

"Give way!" said he to the sailors.

The eight oars fell at once into the sea, making but one single sound, giving one single stroke, and the boat seemed to fly over the surface of the waters.

At the expiration of five minutes they gained the land.

The officer sprang out of the boat, and offered his hand to the lady. A carriage was in waiting.

"Is this carriage for us?" asked she. "The hotel, then, is at some distance."

"At the other end of the town."

"Very well," said My Lady; and she got resolutely into the carriage. The officer saw that the baggage was fastened carefully behind the carriage, and this operation being performed, he took his place beside My Lady, and shut the door.

Immediately, without any order being given, or his place of destination indicated, the coachman set off at a rapid pace, and plunged into the streets of the town.

So strange a reception naturally gave My Lady ample matter for reflection; so, seeing that the young officer did not seem at all disposed for conversation, she reclined in her corner; and, one after the other, passed in review all the suppositions which presented themselves to her mind.

At the end of a quarter of an hour, however, surprised at the length of the journey, she leant forward towards the window to see whither she was being conducted. Houses were no longer to be seen; trees appeared in the darkness like great black phantoms running after one another.

My Lady shuddered with apprehension.

"But we are no longer in the town, sir," said she.

The young officer preserved profound silence.

"I beg you to understand, sir, I will go no further, unless you tell me whither you are taking me."

This threat obtained no reply.

"Oh! but this is outrageous!" cried My Lady. "Help! help! help!"

No voice replied to hers; the carriage continued to roll on with rapidity; the officer appeared a statue.

My Lady looked at the officer with one of those terrible expressions peculiar to her countenance, and which so rarely failed of their effect; anger made her eyes flash in the darkness.

The young man remained impassible.

My Lady endeavored to open the door, in order to throw herself out.

"Take care, madame," said the young man, coldly, "you will kill yourself if you attempt to jump out."

My Lady reseated herself, foaming with rage; the officer leant forward, looked at her in his turn, and appeared surprised to see that face, but just before so beautiful, distorted with passion and become almost hideous. The artful creature at once comprehended that she was injuring herself by allowing him thus to read her soul; she collected her features, and in a complaining voice said:

"In the name of heaven, sir! tell me if it is to you, if it is to your government, or to an enemy I am to attribute the violence done me?"

"No violence will be offered to you, madame, and what happens to you is the result of a very simple measure which we are obliged to adopt with all who land in England."

"Then you don't know me, sir?"

"It is the first time I have had the honor of seeing you."

"And upon your honor, you have no cause of hatred against me?"

"None, I swear to you."

There was so much serenity, coolness, mildness even, in the voice of the young man, that My Lady felt reassured.

At length, after a journey of nearly an hour, the carriage stopped before an iron gate, which enclosed an avenue leading to a castle severe in form, massive and isolated. Then, as the wheels rolled over a fine gravel, My Lady could hear a vast roaring, recognized as the sea, dashing against some steep coast.

The carriage passed under two arched gateways, and at length stopped in a large, dark, square court; almost immediately the door of the carriage was opened, the young man sprang lightly out and presented his hand to My Lady, who leant upon it, and in her turn alighted with tolerable calmness.

"Still, then, I am a prisoner," said My Lady, looking around her, and bringing back her eyes with a most gracious smile to the young officer; "but I feel assured it will not be for long," added she; "my own conscience and your politeness, sir, are the guarantee, of that."

However flattering this compliment was, the officer made no reply; but drawing from his belt a little silver whistle, such as boatswains use in ships of war, he whistled three times, with three different modulations:—immediately several men appeared, who unharnessed the smoking horses, and put the carriage into a coach-house.

The officer then, with the same calm politeness, invited the lady to enter the house. She, with a still smiling countenance, took his arm, and passed with him under a low-arched door, which, by a vaulted passage, lighted only at the farther end, led to a stone staircase, turning round an angle of stone; they then came to a massive door, which, after the introduction of a key into the lock by the young officer, turned heavily upon its hinges, and disclosed the chamber destined for My Lady.

With a single glance the prisoner took in the apartment in its minutest details. It was a chamber whose furniture was at once proper for a prisoner or a free man; and yet, bars at the windows and outside bolts at the door decided the question in favor of the prison.

In an instant all the strength of mind of this creature, though drawn from the most vigorous sources, abandoned her; she sank into a large chair, with her arms crossed, her head hanging down, and expecting every instant to see a judge enter to interrogate her.

But no one entered execept two marines, who brought in her trunks and packages, deposited them in a corner of the room, and retired without speaking.

The officer presided over all these details with the same calmness My Lady had observed in him, never pronouncing a word, and making himself obeyed by a gesture of his hand or a sound of his whistle.

It might have been said that between this man and his inferiors spoken language did not exist, or had become useless.

At length My Lady could hold out no longer; she broke the silence:

"In the name of Heaven, sir!" cried she, "what does all this

that is passing mean? Put an end to my doubts; I have courage enough for any danger I can foresee, for every misfortune which I can comprehend. Where am I, and why am I here! If I am free, why these bars and these doors? if I am a prisoner, what crime have I committed?"

"You are here in the apartment destined for you, madame. I received orders to go and take charge of you at sea, and to conduct you to the castle; this order I believe I have accomplished, with all the exactness of a soldier, but also with the courtesy of a gentleman. There terminates, at least to the present moment, the duty I had to fulfill towards you; the rest concerns another person."

"And who is that other person?" asked My Lady, warmly; "can you not tell me his name?"

At the moment a great jingling of spurs was heard upon the stairs; some voices passed, and faded away, and the sound of footsteps approached the door.

"That person is here, madame," said the officer, leaving the entrance open, and drawing himself up in an attitude of respect.

At the same time the door opened; a man appeared in the opening. He was without a hat, wore a sword, and carried a handkerchief in his hand.

"What! my brother," cried she, in a state of stupor, "is it you?"

"Yes, fair lady!" replied Lord Winter, making a bow, half courteous, half ironical—"it is I, myself, as this castle is mine and this cell yours."

"I am your prisoner, then?"

"That's about it."

"But this is a frightful abuse of power!"

"No high-sounding words! let us sit down and chat quietly, as brother and sister ought to do."

Then, turning towards the door, and seeing that the young officer was waiting for his last orders, he said:

"All's well, I thank you; now leave us alone, Lieut. Felton."

CHAPTER XLVIII.

A CHAT BETWEEN BROTHER AND SISTER.

DURING the time that Lord Winter took to shut the door, close a shutter, and draw a chair near to his sister-in-law's seat, My Lady, anxiously thoughtful, plunged her glance into the depths of possibility, and discovered all the plan, of which she could not even get a glance as long as she was ignorant into whose hands she had fallen. She knew her brother to be a worthy gentleman, a bold hunter, an intrepid player, enterprising with women, but by no means remarkable for his skill in the business of intrigues. How had he discovered her arrival? caused her to be seized? Why did he detain her?

At all events, she congratulated herself upon having fallen into the hands of her brother-in-law, with whom she reckoned she could deal very easily, rather than into the hands of a direct and intelligent enemy.

"Yes, let us chat, brother," said she, with a kind of cheerfulness, decided as she was to draw from the conversation, in spite of all the dissimulation Lord Winter could bring to it, the information of which she stood in need to regulate her future conduct.

"You were, then, determined to come to England again," said Lord Winter, "in spite of the resolutions you so often manifested in Paris never to set your foot more on British ground?"

"Come! why, to see you," replied My Lady, without knowing how much she aggravated by this reply the suspicions which d'Artagnan's letter had given birth to in the mind of her brother-in-law, and only desiring to gain the good will of her auditor by a falsehood.

"So it was for my sake alone you have taken the trouble to cross the Channel?"

"For your sake only."

"The deuce! what tenderness, my sister!"

"Why, am I not your nearest relation?" demanded My Lady, with a tone of the most touching ingenuousness.

"And your son my sole heir!" said Lord Winter in his turn, fixing his eyes on My Lady's.

Whatever command she had over herself, she could not help starting, and as, in pronouncing the last words, Lord Winter placed his hand upon the arm of his sister, this start did not escape him.

"I do not comprehend, my lord," said she, to gain time and make her adversary speak out. "What do you mean to say? Is there any secret meaning concealed beneath your words?"

"Oh! good Lord! no," said Lord Winter, with an apparent good nature, "you wish to see me, and you come to England. I learn this desire, or rather I suspect that you feel it, and, in order to spare you all the annoyances of a nocturnal arrival in a port, and all the fatigues of landing, I send one of my officers to meet you, I place a carriage at his orders, and he brings you hither to this castle, of which I am governor, whither I come every day, and where, in order to satisfy our mutual desire of seeing each other, I have prepared you a chamber. What is there more astonishing in all that I have said to you, than in that which you have told me?"

"No, all that I think astonishing is that you should be aware of my coming."

"And yet that is the most simple thing in the world, my dear sister: have you not observed that the captain of your little vessel, on entering the road, sent forward, to obtain permission to enter the port, a little boat bearing his log-book and the register of his crew? As port governor, they brought me that book. I recognized your name in it. My heart told me what your

mouth has just confirmed, that is to say with what view you have exposed yourself to the dangers of so perilous a sea, or at least so troublesome at this moment, and I sent my cutter to meet you. You know the rest."

My Lady comprehended that Lord Winter lied, and was only the more alarmed.

"Brother," continued she, "was not that Lord Buckingham whom I saw on the jetty, this evening, as we entered the port?"

"Himself. Ah! I can understand how the sight of him struck you," replied Lord Winter: "you come from a country where he must be very much talked of, and I know that his armaments against France greatly engage the attention of your friend the Cardinal."

"My friend!" cried My Lady, seeing that, upon this point as upon the other, Lord Winter seemed perfectly well informed.

"Is he not your friend?" replied the baron negligently; "ah! I crave your pardon, I thought he was; but we will return to my lord duke presently, let us not depart from the sentimental turn our conversation had taken: you came, you say, to see me? I reply to you that you shall be attended to, to the height of your wishes, and that we shall see each other every day. Tell me on what footing your household was established by your first husband, and, although I am only your brother-in-law, I will arrange it upon a similar one."

"My first husband!" cried My Lady, staring, with eyes almost starting from their sockets.

"Yes, your French husband; I don't speak of my brother. If you have forgotten, as he is till living, I can write to him, and he will send me information on the subject."

A cold sweat burst from the brow of My Lady.

"You are joking!" said she, in a hollow, broken voice.

"Do I look as if I were?" asked the baron, rising and going a step backward.

"Or rather you insult me," continued she, pressing with her stiffened hands the two arms of her chair, and raising herself up upon her wrists.

"I insult you!" said Lord Winter, with contempt; "in truth, madame, do you think that can be possible?"

"In truth, sir," said My Lady, "you must be either drunk or mad: leave the room, sir, and send me a woman."

"Women are very indiscreet, sister! cannot I serve you as a waiting maid? by that means, all our secrets would be kept in the family."

"Insolent wretch!" cried My Lady, and, as if acted upon by a spring, she rushed towards the baron, who awaited her attack with his arms folded, but one hand upon the sword-hilt.

"Come! come!" said he, "I know you are accustomed to assassinate people, but I shall defend myself, I give you notice, even against you."

"No doubt you would!" said she; "you have all the appearance of being coward enough to lift your hand against a woman."

"Perhaps I have, and I have an excuse, for mine would not be the first man's hand that has been placed upon you, I imagine."

And the baron pointed with a slow and accusing gesture to the left shoulder of My Lady, which he almost touched with his finger.

My Lady uttered a deep inward shriek, and retreated to a corner of the room, like a panther which draws back to take its spring.

"Oh! groan and shriek as much as you please," cried Lord Winter, "but don't try to bite, for I warn you the thing would be to your prejudice; there are here no lawyers who regulate successions beforehand; there is no knight-errant to come and seek a quarrel with me, on account of the fair lady I detain a prisoner; but I have judges quite ready, who will quickly dispose of a woman so shameless, as, although already married, to come and steal, a bigamist, into the bed of my brother, and these judges, I warn you, will soon pass you over to a hangman that will make both your shoulders alike."

The eyes of My Lady darted such flashes, that although he was a man, and armed, before an unarmed woman, he felt the chill of fear glide through his whole frame; he, however, not the less continued, but with increasing warmth:

"Yes, I can very well understand that after having inherited the fortune of my brother, it would be very agreeable to you to be my heir likewise; but know, beforehand, if you kill me, or cause me to be killed, my precautions are taken: not a penny of what I possess will pass into your hands. Were you not already rich enough, you who possess a fortune? and could you not stop your fatal career, if you did not do evil for the supreme delight of doing it? Oh! be assured, if the memory of my brother were not sacred to me, you should rot in a state dungeon, or swing at Tyburn: I will be silent, but you must endure your captivity quietly; in fifteen or twenty days I shall set out for La Rochelle, with the army; but before my departure, a vessel which I will see sail, will take you hence, and convey you to our American colonies; and be assured that you shall be accompanied by one who will blow your brains out at the first attempt you may make to return to England or to the Continent."

My Lady listened with an attention that dilated her inflamed eyes.

"Ah! I see your features are resuming their calmness, your countenance is recovering its assurance: fifteen, twenty days, say you, pshaw! I have an inventive mind, before that is expired some idea will occur to me; I have an infernal spirit, I shall meet with a tool. Before fifteen days are gone by, you say to yourself, I shall be away from here! Well, try!"

My Lady, finding her thoughts read, dug her nails into her flesh to subdue every emotion that might give to her physiognomy any expression beyond that of pain.

He went towards the door and opened it hastily.

"Call Master Felton," said he. "Wait a minute longer, and I will introduce him to you."

There followed between these two personages a strange silence, during which the sound of a slow and regular step was heard approaching; shortly a human form appeared in the shade of the corridor, and the young lieutenant, with whom we are already acquainted, stopped at the door, to receive the orders of the baron.

"Come in, my dear John," said Lord Winter, "come in and shut the door."

The young officer entered.

"Now," said the baron, "look at this woman: she is young, she is beautiful, she possesses all earthly seductions. Well, she is a monster, who, at twenty-five years of age, has been guilty of as many crimes as you could read of in a year in the archives of our tribunals: her voice prejudices her hearers in her favor, her beauty serves as a bait to her victims, her body even pays what she promises—I must do her that justice; she will endeavor to seduce you, perhaps she will endeavor to kill you. I have extricated you from misery, Felton, I have raised you to be lieutenant; I once saved your life, you know on what occasion; I am for you not only a protector, but a friend; not only a benefactor, but a father; this woman is come back again into England for the purpose of conspiring against my life; I hold this serpent in my power; well, I call upon you, and say to you: Friend Felton, John, my boy, guard me, and more particularly guard yourself against this woman: swear by your hopes of salvation to keep her safely for the chastisement she has merited. John Felton, I trust in thy word! John Felton, I put faith in thy loyalty!"

"My lord," said the young officer, summoning to his mild countenance all the hatred he could find in his heart—"my lord, I swear all shall be done as you desire."

My Lady received this look like a resigned victim: it was impossible to imagine a more submissive or a more mild expression than that which prevailed on her beautiful countenance. Lord Winter himself could scarcely recognize the tigress who, a minute before, appeared preparing for fight.

"She is not to leave this chamber, understand, John; she is not to correspond with any one, she is to speak to no one but you—if you will do her the honor to address a word to her."

"That is quite sufficient, my lord! I have sworn."

"And now, madame, try to make your peace with God, for you are adjudged by men!"

My Lady let her head sink, as if crushed by this sentence. Lord Winter went out, making a sign to Felton, who followed him, shutting the door after him.

My Lady remained for some minutes in the same position, for she thought they might perhaps be examining her through the keyhole; she then slowly raised her head, which had resumed its formidable expression of menace and defiance, ran to the

door to listen, looked out of her window, and, returning to bury herself again in her chair, she meditated.

CHAPTER XLIX.

"AN OFFICER!"

In the meanwhile, the Cardinal looked anxiously for news from England; but no news arrived but such as were annoying and threatening.

Time passed on, and the Rochellais did not surrender; the last spy that was taken was the bearer of a letter. This letter told Buckingham that the city was at an extremity; but instead of adding, "If your succor does not arrive within fifteen days, we will surrender," it added, quite simply, "If your succor does not arrive within fifteen days, we shall all be dead with hunger when it does arrive."

The Rochellais, then, had no hope but in Buckingham—Buckingham was their Messiah. It was evident that if they one day learnt in a certain manner that they must not reckon upon Buckingham, their courage would fail with their hope. He looked, then, with great impatience for the news from England which would announce to him that Buckingham would not come.

During this time, exempt from these inquietudes of its only and true leader, the royal army led a joyous life, neither provisions nor money being wanting in the camp; all the corps rivalled each other in audacity and gayety. To take spies and hang them, to make hazardous expeditions upon the dyke or the sea, to imagine wild plans, and to execute them coolly, such was the pastime which made the army find these days short, which were not only so long for the Rochellais, a prey to famine and anxiety, as even for the Cardinal, who blockaded them so closely.

One day, on which he was oppressed with a mortal weariness of mind, without hope in the negotiations with the city, without news from England, the Cardinal went out, without any other aim but to go out, accompanied only by Cahusac and La Houdiniere, strolling along the beach. Mingling the immensity of his dreams with the immensity of the ocean, he arrived, his horse going at a foot's pace, on a hill, from the top of which he perceived, behind a hedge, reclining on the sand, and catching in its passage one of those rays of the sun so rare at this period of the year, seven men surrounded by empty bottles. Four of these men were our Musketeers, preparing to listen to a letter one of them had just received. This letter was so important, that it made them abandon their cards and their dice on the drum-head.

The other three were occupied in opening an enormous flagon of wine; these were the lackeys.

Making a sign to La Houdiniere and Cahusac to stop, the Duke alighted from his horse, and went towards these suspected merry companions, hoping by means of the sand which deadened the

sound of his steps, and of the hedge which concealed his approach, to catch some words of this conversation which appeared so interesting; at ten paces from the hedge he recognized the talkative Gascon, and as he had already perceived that these men were Musketeers, he did not doubt that the three others were those called the Inseparables, Athos, Porthos, and Aramis.

It may be supposed that his desire to hear the conversation was augmented by this discovery; his eyes took a strange expression, and with the step of a wild-cat he advanced towards the hedge; but he had not been able to catch more than a few vague syllables without any positive sense, when a sonorous and short cry made him start, and attracted the attention of the Musketeers.

"Officer!" cried Grimaud.

"You are speaking, you scoundrel!" said Athos, rising upon his elbow, and fascinating Grimaud with his angry look.

Grimaud therefore added nothing to his speech, but contented himself with pointing his index finger in the direction of the hedge, denouncing by this gesture the Cardinal and his escort.

With a single bound the Musketeers were on their feet, and saluted with respect.

The Cardinal seemed furious.

"It appears that the Musketeers keep strict guard," said he. "Are the English expected by land, or do the Musketeers consider themselves superior officers?"

"Monseigneur," replied Athos, for, amidst the general fright he alone had preserved the noble calmness and coolness that never forsook him,—"Monseigneur, the Musketeers, when they are not on duty, or when their duty is over, drink and play at dice, and they are certainly superior officers for their lackeys."

"Lackeys!" grumbled the Cardinal; "lackeys, who have the words given to warn their masters when any one passes, are not lackeys, they are sentinels. Do you know what you look like, all together, as you are armed, and guarded by your lackeys?" said the Cardinal: "you look like four conspirators."

"Oh! so far, Monseigneur, that's true," said Athos; "we do conspire, as your Eminence might have seen the other day, only we conspire against the Rochellais."

"Ay! ay! you soldiers turned politicians!" replied the Cardinal, knitting his brow in his turn, "the secret of many unknown things might perhaps be found in your brains, if we could read in them, as in that letter which you concealed as soon as you saw me coming."

The color mounted to the face of Athos, and he made a step towards the Minister.

"We might be led to think that you really suspected us, Monseigneur, and that we were undergoing a real interrogatory, if it be so, we trust your Eminence will deign to explain yourself, and we should then at least be acquainted with our real position."

"And if it were an interrogatory," replied the Cardinal, "others

besides you have undergone such, M. Athos, and have replied to them."

"Thus, I have told your Eminence that you had but to question us, and we are ready to reply."

"What was that letter you were about to read, M. Aramis, and which you so promptly concealed?"

"A woman's letter, Monseigneur."

"Ah! yes, I understand, we must be discreet with this sort of letters; but nevertheless, we may show them to a confessor, and, you know, I have taken orders."

"Monseigneur," said Athos, with a calmness the more terrible from his risking his head when he made this reply, "the letter is a woman's letter, but it is not signed by either Marion de Lorme nor Madame d'Aiguillon."

The Cardinal became as pale as death; a fiery gleam darted from his eyes; he turned round as if to give an order to Cahusac and Houdiniere. Athos saw the movement; he made a step towards the muskets, upon which the other three friends had fixed their eyes as men ill-disposed to allow themselves to be taken. The Cardinal's party consisted of only three; the Musketeers, lackeys included, numbered seven; he judged that the match would be much the less equal, if Athos and his companions were really plotting; and by one of those rapid turns which he always had at command, all his anger faded away into a smile.

"Well! well!" said he, "you are brave young men, proud in daylight, faithful in darkness; we can find no fault with you for watching over yourselves, when you watch so carefully over others. Gentlemen, I have not forgotten the night in which you served me as an escort to the Red Dovecote: if there were any danger to be apprehended on the road I am going, I would request you to accompany me; but as there is none, remain where you are, finish your bottles, your game, and your letter. Adieu, gentlemen!"

And remounting his horse, which Cahusac led to him, he saluted them with his hand, and rode away.

The four, standing and motionless, followed him with their eyes, without speaking a single word, until he had disappeared.

Then they looked at each other.

The countenances of all gave evidence of terror; for, notwithstanding the friendly adieu of his Eminence, they plainly perceived that he went away with rage in his heart.

Athos alone smiled with a self-possessed, disdainful smile.

"That Grimaud kept bad watch!" cried Porthos, when the Cardinal was out of hearing and sight, who had a great inclination to vent his ill-humor on somebody.

Grimaud was about to reply to excuse himself. Athos lifted his finger, and Grimaud was silent.

"Would you have given up the letter, Aramis?" said d'Artagnan.

"I!" said Aramis, in his most flute-like tone; "I had made up my mind; if he had insisted upon the letter being given up

to him, I would have presented the letter to him with one hand, and with the other I would have run my sword through his body."

"I expected as much," said Athos; "and that was why I threw myself between you and him. In good truth, this man is very much to blame to talk in this manner to other men; one would say he had never had to do with any but women and children."

"My dear Athos, I admire your behavior very much, but nevertheless, we were in the wrong after all."

"How, in the wrong!" said Athos. "Whose, then, is the air we breathe? Whose is the ocean upon which we look? Whose is the sand upon which we were reclining? Whose is that letter of your mistress's? Do these belong to the Cardinal? Upon my honor, this man fancies the world belongs to him; there you stood, stammering, stupefied, annihilated! one might have supposed that the Bastile appeared before you, and that the gigantic Medusa had converted you into stone. Is being in love conspiring? You are in love with a woman whom the Cardinal has caused to be shut up, and you wish to get her out of the hands of his Eminence; that's a match you are playing with the Cardinal; this letter is your game, why should you expose your game to your adversary? That is never done. Let him find it out if he can! We can find out his!"

"Well, that's all very sensible, Athos," said d'Artagnan.

"In that case, let there be no more question of what's past, and let Aramis resume the letter from his cousin, where the Cardinal interrupted him."

Aramis drew the letter from his pocket, the three friends surrounded him, and the three lackeys grouped themselves again near the wine-jar.

"You had only read a line or two," said d'Artagnan; "begin the letter again, then."

"Willingly," said Aramis.

My Dear Cousin,—I think I shall make up my mind to set out for Stenay, where my sister has placed our little servant in the Carmelite Nunnery; this poor child is quite resigned, as she knows she cannot live elsewhere without the salvation of her soul being in danger. Nevertheless, if the affairs of your family are arranged, as we hope they will be, I believe she will run the risk of being damned, and will return to those she regrets, particularly as she knows they are always thinking of her. In the meanwhile, she is not very wretched; what she most desires is a letter from her intended. I know that such sort of provisions pass with difficulty through convent gratings; but after all, as I have given you proofs, my dear cousin, I am not unskilled in such affairs, and I will take charge of the commission. My sister thanks you for your good and eternal remembrance. She has experienced much inquietude; but she is now at length a little reassured, having sent her secretary yonder, in order that nothing may happen unexpectedly.

Adieu, my dear cousin; let us hear from you as often as you can, that is to say, as often as you can with safety. I embrace you.

Marie Michon.

"Oh! what do I not owe you, Aramis?" said d'Artagnan. "Dear Constance! I have at length, then, intelligence of you;

she lives, she is in safety in a convent, she is at Stenay! Where is Stenay, Athos?"

"Why, a few leagues from the frontiers of Alsace, in Lorraine; the siege once over, we shall be able to make a tour in that direction."

"And that will not be long, it is to be hoped," said Porthos; "for they have this morning hung a spy who confessed that the Rochellais had come to eat the leather of their shoes. Supposing, that after having eaten the uppers they eat the soles, I cannot see anything else they have left, unless they eat one another."

"Poor fools!" said Athos, emptying a glass of excellent Bordeaux wine, which, without having, at that period, the reputation it now enjoys, merited it no less: "poor fools! as if the Catholic religion was not the most advantageous and the most agreeable of all religions! It's all one," resumed he, after having smacked his tongue against his palate, "they are brave fellows! But what the devil are you about Aramis?" continued Athos; "why you are squeezing that letter into your pocket!"

"Yes," said d'Artagnan, "Athos is right, it must be burnt; and yet, if we burn it, who knows whether the Cardinal has not a secret to interrogate ashes?"

"He must have one," said Athos.

"What will you do with the letter, then?" asked Porthos.

"Come here, Grimaud," said Athos. "As a punishment for having spoken without permission, my friend, you will please to eat this piece of paper; then to recompense you for the service you will have rendered us, you shall afterwards drink this glass of wine; here is the letter first, eat heartily."

Grimaud smiled; and with his eyes fixed upon the glass which Athos held in his hand, he ground the paper between his teeth, and then swallowed it.

"Bravo! Master Grimaud!" said Athos, "and now take this; that's well! we dispense with your saying thank you."

Grimaud silently swallowed the glass of Bordeaux wine: but his eyes raised towards heaven spoke, during the whole time this delicious occupation lasted, a language which, for being mute, was not the less expressive.

"And now," said Athos, "unless the Cardinal should form the ingenious idea of ripping up Grimaud, I think we may be pretty much at our ease respecting the letter."

In the meantime his Eminence continued his melancholy ride, murmuring between his mustache:

"These four men must positively be mine."

CHAPTER L.

THE FIRST DAY OF CAPTIVITY.

Let us return to My Lady, whom a glance thrown upon the coast of France has made us lose sight of for an instant.

We shall find her still in the despairing attitude in which we left her, plunged in an abyss of dismal reflections, a dark hell, at the gate of which she has almost left hope behind; for the first time she doubts, for the first time she fears.

On two occasions her fortune has failed her, on two occasions she has found herself discovered and betrayed; and on these two occasions, it was before the fatal genius, sent doubtlessly by Heaven to combat her, that she has succumbed: d'Artagnan has conquered her; that invincible power of evil.

All this failure she owes to d'Artagnan, without doubt; from whom can come so many disgraces heaped upon her head, if not from him? He alone could have transmitted to Lord Winter all these frightful secrets, which he has discovered, one after another, by a train of fatalities. He knows her brother-in-law, and must have written to him.

What hatred she distils! There, motionless, with her burning, fixed glances in her desert apartment, how well the outbursts of passion, which at times escaped from the depths of her chest with her respiration, accompany the sound of the surge which rises, growls, roars, and breaks itself, like an eternal and powerless despair, against the rocks upon which is built this dark and lofty castle! How many magnificent projects of vengeance she conceives by the light of the flashes which her tempestuous passion casts over her mind, against Madame Bonacieux, against Buckingham, but, above all, against d'Artagnan—projects lost in the distance of the future!

Yes, but in order to avenge herself she must be free; and to be free, a prisoner has to pierce a wall, detach bars, cut through a floor—all undertaking which a patient and strong man may accomplish, but before which the feverish irritations of a woman must give way. Besides, to do all this, time is necessary—months, years—and she has ten or twelve days, as Lord Winter, her fraternal and terrible jailer, told her.

And yet, if she were a man, she would attempt all this, and, perhaps might succeed; why then, did heaven make the mistake of placing that manlike soul in that frail and delicate body?

The first moments of her captivity were terrible; a few convulsions of rage which she could not suppress paid her debt of feminine weakness to nature. But by degrees she overcame the outbursts of her mad passion; the nervous tremblings which agitated her frame disappeared, and she remained folded within herself, like a fatigued serpent reposing.

"Why, I must have been mad to allow myself to be carried away so," says she, plunging into the glass, which reflects back

to her eyes the burning glance by which she appears to interrogate herself. "No violence; violence is the proof of weakness;" at length she murmured, satisfied with herself:

"Come, nothing is lost. I am still beautiful."

It was then nearly eight o'clock in the evening. My Lady perceived a bed; she calculated that the repose of a few hours would not only refresh her head and her ideas, but still further, her complexion. A better idea, however, came into her mind, before going to bed. She had heard something said about supper. She had already been an hour in this apartment; it could not be long before they brought her repast. The prisoner was determined not to lose any time; she resolved to make that very evening, some attempts to ascertain the nature of the ground she had to work upon, by studying the characters of the people to whose guardianship she was committed.

A light appeared under the door; this light announced the reappearance of her jailers. My Lady, who had arisen, threw herself quickly into the chair, her head thrown back, her beautiful hair unbound and dishevelled, her bosom half bare beneath her crumpled laces, one hand on her heart and the other hanging down.

The bolts were drawn, the door groaned upon its hinges, steps sounded in the chamber and drew near.

"Place that table there," said a voice, which the prisoner recognized as Felton's.

The order was obeyed.

"Bring lights, and relieve the sentinel," continued Felton.

And this double order which the young man gave to the same individuals, proved to My Lady that her servants were the same men as her guards—that is to say, soldiers.

Felton's orders were, for the rest, executed with a silent rapidity that gave a good idea of the state in which he kept up discipline.

At length Felton, who had not looked at My Lady, turned towards her.

"Oh!" said he, "she has fainted. Go and tell Lord Winter that his prisoner has fainted. The case not having been foreseen, I don't know what to do."

The soldier went to obey the orders of his officer; Felton sat down upon the chair which was by chance near the door, and waited without speaking a word, without making a gesture. My Lady possessed that great art, so much studied by women, of looking through her long eyelashes without appearing to open the lids; she perceived Felton, who sat with his back towards her. She continued to look at him during nearly ten minutes, and in these ten minutes the impassible guardian never turned round once.

She then thought that Lord Winter would come, and by his presence give fresh strength to the jailer: her first trial was lost; she consequently raised her head, opened her eyes, and sighed deeply.

At this sigh Felton turned round.

"Ah! you have come to, madam," he said; "then, I have nothing more to do here. If you want anything, you can ring."

"Oh! my God! how I have suffered," said My Lady, in that harmonious voice which, like that of the ancient enchantresses, charmed all those they wished to destroy.

And she assumed, sitting up, a still more graceful and voluptuous position than when reclining.

Felton rose.

"You will be served thus, madam, three times a day," said he; "in the morning at nine o'clock, in the day at one o'clock, and in the evening at eight. If that does not suit you, you can point out what other hours you prefer, and in this respect your wishes will be complied with."

"But am I to remain always alone in this vast and dismal chamber?" asked My Lady.

"A woman of the neighborhood has been sent for who will be to-morrow at the castle, and will return as often as you desire her presence."

"I thank you, sir," replied the prisoner humbly.

Felton made a slight bow, and directed his steps towards the door. At the moment he was about to go out Lord Winter appeared in the corridor, followed by the soldier sent to inform him of the fainting. He held a phial of smelling salts in his hand.

"Well, what's going on here?" said he, in a jeering voice, on seeing the prisoner sitting up, and Felton about to go out. "Is this dead woman come to life again already? Felton, my lad, did you not perceive that you were taken for a novice, and that the first act was being performed of a comedy of which we shall doubtless have the pleasure of following out all the developments?"

"I imagined that might be the case, my lord," said Felton; "but as the prisoner is a woman, after all, I wished to pay her the attention that every man of gentle birth owes to a woman, if not on her account, at least on his own."

My Lady shuddered through her whole system. These words passed like ice through her veins.

"So," replied Winter laughing, "that beautiful hair so skilfully dishevelled, that white skin and that languishing look, have not yet seduced you, you heart of stone?"

"No, my lord," replied the impassible young man; "your lordship may be assured that it requires more than the tricks and coquetry of a woman to corrupt me."

"In that case, my brave lieutenant, let us leave My Lady to find out some other trick and go to supper; but remember she has a fruitful imagination, and the second act of the comedy will not be long after the first."

And at these words Lord Winter passed his arm through that of Felton, and led him out, laughing.

"Oh! I will be a match for you!" murmured My Lady be-

tween her teeth; "be assured of that, you poor should-be monk, you poor converted soldier, who have cut your uniform out of a monk's frock!"

"By the way," resumed Winter, stopping at the door, "you must not, My Lady, let this check take away your appetite. Taste that fowl and fish; 'pon honor, they are not poisoned. I agree very well with my cook, and he is not to be my heir, I have full and perfect confidence in him. Do as I do. Good-bye, dear sister! till your next fainting fit!"

This was all that My Lady could endure: her hands became clenched, she ground her teeth inwardly, her eyes followed the motion of the door as it closed behind Lord Winter and Felton, and the moment she was alone a fresh fit of despair seized her; she cast her eyes upon the table, saw the glittering of a knife, rushed towards it and clutched it; but her disappointment was cruel: the blade was blunt, and of flexible silver.

A burst of laughter resounded from the other side of the ill-closed door, and the door was reopened.

"Ha! ha! ha!" cried Lord Winter; "Ha! ha! ha! don't you see, my brave Felton! don't you see what I told you? That knife was for you, my lad; she would have killed you. Observe, this is one of her peculiarities, to get rid thus, after one fashion or another, of all the people who inconvenience her. If I had listened to you, the knife would have been pointed and of steel. Then it would have been all over with Felton; she would have cut your throat, and, after that the throat of everybody else. Look at her, John, see how well she knows how to handle a knife."

In fact, My Lady still held the harmless weapon in her clenched hand, but this supreme insult relaxed her hands, her strength, and even her will. The knife fell to the ground.

"You were right, my lord," said Felton, with a tone of profound disgust, which sounded to the very bottom of the heart of My Lady; "you were right, my lord, and I in the wrong."

And both left the room afresh.

But this time My Lady lent a more attentive ear than the first, and she heard their steps die away in the distance of the corridor.

She sat down to table, ate of several dishes, drank a little Spanish wine, and felt all her resolution return.

Before she went to bed, she had commented upon, analyzed, turned on all sides, examined on all points the words, the gestures, the signs, and even the silence of her interlocutors, and from this profound, skilful, and anxious study it resulted that Felton was, everything considered, the more vulnerable of her two persecutors.

One expression above all recurred to the mind of the prisoner:

"If I had listened to you," Lord Winter had said to Felton.

Felton then had spoken in her favor, since Lord Winter had not been willing to listen to Felton.

"Weak or strong," repeated My Lady, "that man has a spark of pity in his soul; of that spark I will make a flame that shall

devour him. He is a young, ingenious, pure man who seems virtuous; him there are means of destroying."

And My Lady went to bed and fell asleep, with a smile upon her lips. Any one who had seen her sleeping, might have said she was a maid dreaming of the crown of flowers she was to wear as a May Queen.

CHAPTER LI.

THE SECOND DAY.

In the morning, when they entered her chamber, My Lady was still in bed. Felton remained in the corridor; he brought with him the woman of whom he had spoken the evening before, and who had just arrived; this woman entered, and approaching the bed, offered her services.

My Lady was habitually pale; her complexion might, therefore, deceive a person who saw her for the first time.

"I am in a fever," said she; "I have not slept a single instant during all this long night—I am in frightful pain; are you likely to be more humane to me than others were to me yesterday? All I ask is, permission to remain in bed."

"Would you like to have a physician sent for?" said the woman.

"Go and fetch a physician!" said she; "what could be the good of that? These gentlemen declared yesterday that my illness was a comedy; it would be just the same to-day, no doubt; for, since yesterday evening they have had plenty of time to send for a doctor."

"Then," said Felton, who became impatient, "say yourself, madam, what treatment you wish to be pursued."

"Eh! how can I tell? My God! I know that I am in pain, that's all; give me anything you like, it is of very little consequence to me."

"Go and fetch Lord Winter," said Felton, tired of these eternal complaints.

"Oh! no, no!" cried My Lady; "no, sir, do not call him, I conjure you. I am well, I want nothing; do not call him."

She gave so much vehemence, and prevailing eloquence to this exclamation, that Felton, in spite of himself, advanced some steps into the room.

"He comes!" thought My Lady.

"If you *really* are in pain," said Felton, "a physician shall be sent for; and if you deceive us, well! why it will be the worse for you, but at least we shall not have to reproach ourselves with anything."

My Lady made no reply, but turning her beautiful head round upon her pillow, she burst into tears, and uttered heart-breaking sobs.

Felton surveyed her for an instant with his usual impassibility; then, seeing that the crisis threatened to be prolonged, he

went out; the woman followed him, and Lord Winter did not appear.

"I fancy I begin to see my way," murmured My Lady, with a savage joy, burying herself under the clothes to conceal from anybody who might be watching her, this burst of inward satisfaction.

In the morning, when the woman and Felton came, they had brought her breakfast; now she thought they could not be long before they came to clear the table, and that Felton would then come back.

My Lady was not deceived: Felton reappeared, and without observing whether she had or not touched her repast, he made a sign that the table should be carried out of the room, it being brought in ready spread.

Felton remained behind: he held a book in his hand.

My Lady, reclining in an armchair, near the chimney, beautiful, pale, and resigned, looked like a virgin awaiting martyrdom.

Felton approached her, and said:

"Lord Winter, who is a Catholic, as well as yourself, madam, thinking that the privation of the rites and ceremonies of your Church might be painful to you, has consented that you should read every day the ordinary of *your mass,* and here is a book which contains the ritual of it."

At the manner in which Felton laid the book upon the little table near which My Lady was sitting, at the tone in which he pronounced the two words "your mass;" at the disdainful smile with which he accompanied them, My Lady raised her head, and looked more attentively at the officer.

She recognized one of those morose Puritans she had so often met with, as well at the court of King James as that of France, where, in spite of the remembrance of the Saint Bartholomew, they sometimes came to seek refuge.

"I!" said she, with disdain in unison with that which she had remarked in the voice of the young officer, "I, sir; *my mass;* Lord Winter, the corrupted Catholic, knows very well that I am not of his religion, and this is a snare he wishes to lay for me!"

"And of what religion are you, then, madam?" asked Felton, with an astonishment which, in spite of the empire he held over himself, he could not entirely conceal.

"I will tell it," cried My Lady, with a feigned exultation, "on the day when I shall have suffered sufficiently for my faith."

The look of Felton revealed to My Lady the full extent of the space she had opened for herself by this single word.

The young officer, however, remained mute and motionless; his look alone had spoken.

"I am in the hands of mine enemies," continued she, with that tone of enthusiasm which she knew was familiar to the Puritans; "well let my God save me, or let me perish for my God! That is the reply I beg you to make to Lord Winter

And as to this book," added she, pointing to the ritual with her finger, but without touching it, as if she must be contaminated by the touch, "you may carry it back and make use of it yourself; for, doubtless, you are doubly the accomplice of Lord Winter; the accomplice in his persecutions, and his heresy."

Felton made no reply, took the book with the same appearance of repugnance which he had before manifested, and retired pensively.

Lord Winter came towards five o'clock in the evening; My Lady had had time, during the whole day, to trace her plan of conduct. She received him like a woman who had already recovered all her advantages.

"It appears," said the baron, seating himself in the chair opposite to that occupied by My Lady, and stretching out his legs carelessly upon the hearth, "it appears we have made a little apostasy since we last met, you have changed your religion; you have not, by chance, married a Protestant for a third husband, have you?"

"Explain yourself, my lord," replied the prisoner, with majesty; "for, though I hear your words, I declare I do not understand them."

"Then it is, that you have no religion at all; I like that best," replied Lord Winter, laughing.

"It is certain that that is most accordant with your own principles," replied My Lady, coldly.

"Well, I confess it is all perfectly the same to me."

"Oh! you need not avow this religious indifference, my lord, your debaucheries and crimes would gain credit for it."

"What! you talk of debaucheries, Messalina! Either I misunderstand you, or, you are pretty impudent!"

"You only speak thus because you know you are listened to, sir," coldly replied My Lady; "and you wish to interest your jailers and your hangmen against me."

"My jailers! and my hangmen! Heyday, madam! you are getting quite into a poetical tone, and the comedy of yesterday is turning this evening into a tragedy. As to the rest, in eight days you will be where you ought to be, and my task will be completed."

"Infamous task! impious task!" cried My Lady, with the exultation of a victim provoking the judge.

"On my soul!" said De Winter, rising, "I think the jade is going mad! Come, come, calm yourself, Mistress Puritan, or I'll remove you to a dungeon. It's my Spanish wine that has got into your head, is it not? But, never mind, that sort of intoxication is not dangerous, and will have no consequences."

And Lord Winter retired swearing, which at that period was a very cavalier-like habit.

Felton was, in fact, beind the door and had not lost one word of this scene.

My Lady had guessed as much.

Silence was re-established—two hours passed away; My Lady's

supper was brought in, and she was found deeply engaged in saying her prayers aloud; prayers which she had learnt of an old servant of her second husband's, a most austere Puritan. She appeared to be in ecstasy, and did not pay the least attention to what was going on around her. Felton made a sign that she should not be disturbed; and when all was arranged, he went out quietly with the soldiers.

My Lady knew she might be watched, so she continued her prayers to the end; and it appeared to her that the soldier who was on duty at her door did not march with the same step, but seemed to listen.

For the moment she required no more; she arose, placed herself at table, ate but little, and drank only water.

An hour after, her table was cleared; but My Lady remarked that this time Felton did not accompany the soldiers.

He feared, then, to see her too often.

She turned towards the wall to smile; for there was in this smile such an expression of triumph, that this singly would have betrayed her.

She allowed, therefore, half an hour to pass away; and as at that moment all was silence in the old castle, as nothing was heard but the eternal murmur of the waves—that immense respiration of the ocean—with her pure, harmonious, and powerful voice, she began the first couplet of a psalm then in greatest favor with the Puritans.

Whilst singing, My Lady listened. The soldier on guard at her door stopped, as if he had been changed into stone.

"Hold your tongue, madam!" said he; "your song is as dismal as a *De profundis;* and if, besides the pleasure of being in garrison here, we must hear such things as these, no mortal can hold out."

"Silence!" then said another stern voice, which My Lady recognized as that of Felton; "what business is it of yours, you stupid fellow! Did anybody order you to prevent that woman from singing? No; you were told to guard her—to fire at her if she attempted to flee. Keep her there; if she flees, kill her; but don't exceed your orders."

An expression of unspeakable joy lighted the countenance of My Lady; but this expression was fleeting as the reflection of lightning, and, without appearing to have heard the dialogue, of which she had not lost a word, she began again, giving to her voice all the charm, power and seduction the demon had bestowed upon it.

Her voice, of immense power and of sublime expression, gave to the rude, unpolished poetry a magic and an effect which the most exalted Puritans rarely found in the songs of their brethern, and which they were forced to ornament with all the resources of their imagination. Felton believed he heard the singing of the angel who consoled the three Hebrews in the furnace.

He opened the door quickly, and My Lady saw him appear, pale as usual, but with his eyes inflamed and almost wild.

"Why do you sing thus, and with such a voice?" said he.

"I crave your pardon, sir," said My Lady, with mildness; "I forgot that my songs were out of place in this mansion. I have, perhaps, offended you in your religious opinions; but it was without wishing to do so, I assure you. "I will be silent, then," said My Lady, casting down her eyes, with all the sweetness she could give to her voice, with all the resignation she could impress upon her manner.

"No, no, madam," said Felton; "only do not sing so loud, particularly at night."

And at these words Felton, feeling that he could not long maintain his severity towards his prisoner, rushed out of the room.

CHAPTER LII.

THE THIRD DAY.

Felton had fallen, but there was still another step to be taken—he must be retained, or, rather, he must be left quite alone; and My Lady but obscurely perceived the means which could lead to this result.

Still more must be done: he must be made to speak, in order that he might be spoken to; for My Lady very well knew that her greatest seduction was in her voice, which so skilfully ran over the whole gamut of tones, from human speech to celestial language.

Towards mid-day Lord Winter came to her apartment.

It was a tolerably fine winter's day, and a ray of that pale English sun, which lightens but does not warm, passed through the bars of her prison.

My Lady was looking out at the window, and pretended not to hear the door as it opened.

"Ah, ah!" said Lord Winter, "after having played comedy, after having played tragedy, we are now playing melancholy, eh?"

The prisoner made no reply.

"Yes, yes," continued Winter, "I understand—you would like very well to be at liberty on that beach! you would like very well to be in a good ship, dancing upon the waves of that emerald-green sea; you would like very well, either on land or on the ocean, to lay for me one of those nice little ambuscades you are so skilful in planning. Patience, patience! in four days' time the shore will be beneath your foot, the sea will be open to you—more open than will, perhaps, be agreeable to you; for in four days England will be relieved of your presence."

My Lady clasped her hands, and raising her fine eyes towards heaven—

"Lord, Lord!" said she, with an angelic meekness of gesture and tone, "pardon this man, as I myself pardon him!"

"Yes, pray, accursed woman!" cried the baron; "your prayers is so much the more generous from your being, I swear to you,

in the power of a man who will never pardon you!" And he left the room.

At the moment he went out, a piercing glance darted through the opening of the nearly closed door, and she perceived Felton, who drew quickly on one side to prevent being seen by her.

Then she threw herself upon her knees, and began to pray.

"My God, my God!" said he, "you know in what holy cause I suffer; give me, then, the strength to support my sufferings."

Then only she feigned to hear the sound of Felton's steps, and, rising quick as thought, she blushed, as if ashamed of being surprised on her knees.

"I do not like to disturb yourself on my account, I beseech ton, seriously; "do not disturb yourself on my account, I beseech you."

"How do you know I was praying, sir?" said My Lady, in a voice interrupted by sobs. "You were deceived, sir; I was not praying."

"Do you think then, madam," replied Felton, in the same serious voice, but with a more mild tone, "do you think I assume the right of preventing a creature from prostrating herself before her Creator? God forbid! God forbid! Besides, repentance becomes the guilty; whatever crimes they may have committed, for me the guilty are sacred at the feet of God!"

"Guilty!—I?" said My Lady, with a smile which might have disarmed the angel of the last judgment. "Guilty! oh, my God, Thou knowest whether I am guilty! Say I am condemned, sir if you please; but you know that God, who loveth martyrs, sometimes permits the innocent to be condemned."

"Were you condemned, were you innocent, were you a martyr," replied Felton, "the greater would be the necessity for prayer; and I myself will aid you with my prayers."

"Oh, you are a just man!" cried My Lady, throwing herself on her knees at his feet; "I can hold out no longer, for I fear I shall be wanting in strength in the moment at which I shall be forced to undergo the struggle, and confess my faith. Listen then, to the supplication of a despairing woman. You are abused, sir, you must be ignorant of Lord Winter's designs upon me?"

"I am unacquainted with them."

"Why, then," cried My Lady, with an incredible tone of truthfulness, "why, then, if not his accomplice—you do not know that he destines me to a disgrace which all the punishments of the world cannot equal in horror?"

"You are deceived, madame," said Felton blushing; "Lord Winter is not capable of such a crime."

"The friend of the Infamous One is capable of everything."

"Whom do you call the infamous?" asked Felton.

"Are there, then, in England two men to whom such an epithet can be applied?"

"You mean George Villiers?" said Felton, whose looks became agitated.

"Whom Pagans and infidel Gentiles call Duke of Bucking-

ham," replied My Lady; "I could not have thought that there was an Englishman in all England, who would have required so long an explanation to make him understand of whom I was speaking."

"The hand of the Lord is stretched over him," said Felton, "he will not escape the chastisement he deserves."

Felton did but express, with regard to the Duke, the feeling of execration which all the English had vowed to him whom the Catholics themselves called the extortioner, the pillager, the *debauche;* and whom the Puritans styled simply Satan.

"Oh, my God!" moaned My Lady; "when I supplicate you to pour upon this man the chastisement which is his due, you know that it is not my own vengeance I pursue, but the deliverance of a whole nation that I implore!"

"Do you know him, then?" asked Felton.

"At length he interrogates me!" said My Lady to herself, at the height of joy at having obtained so quickly such a result—"Oh! know him! yes! to my misfortune, to my eternal misfortune!" and My Lady wrung her hands, as if arrived at the very paroxysm of grief.

Felton no doubt felt within himself that his strength was abandoning him, and he made several steps towards the door; but the prisoner, whose eye was never off him, sprang in pursuit of him, and stopped him.

"Sir," cried she, "be kind, be clement, listen to my prayer; that knife, which the fatal prudence of the baron deprived me of, because he knows the use I would make of it; oh! hear me to the end! that knife, give it to me for a minute only, for mercy's sake, for pity's sake! I will embrace your knees! you shall shut the door that you may be certain I contemplate no injury to you! my God! to you! the only just, good, and compassionate being I have met with—to you! my saviour, perhaps! one minute, that knife, one minute, a single minute, and I will restore it to you through the grating of the door; only one minute, Master Felton, and you will have saved my honor!"

"To kill yourself!" cried Felton, with terror, forgetting to withdraw his hands from the hands of the prisoner; "remember, madam, if our God forbids us to speak falsely, he much more severely forbids us to commit suicide."

"When God sees one of his creatures persecuted unjustly, placed between suicide and dishonor, believe me, sir," replied My Lady in a tone of deep conviction, "God pardons suicide: for, then, suicide becomes martyrdom."

"I repeat it to you," replied Felton, in great emotion, "no danger threatens you; I will answer for Lord Winter as for myself."

"Senseless man!" cried My Lady, "poor senseless man! who dares to answer for another man, when the wisest, when those most after God's own heart, hesitate to answer for themselves; and who ranges himself on the side of the strongest and the most fortunate, to crush the weakest and the most unfortunate."

"Impossible, madam, impossible," murmured Felton, who felt to the bottom of his heart the justness of this argument; "a prisoner, you shall not recover your liberty by my means; living, you shall not lose your life by my means!"

"Yes," cried My Lady, "but I shall lose that which is much dearer to me than life, I shall lose my honor, Felton; and it is you, you whom I make responsible, before God and before men, for my shame and my infamy."

This time Felton impassible as he was, or appeared to be, could not resist the secret influence which had already taken possession of him; to see this woman, so beautiful, fair as the brightest vision, to see her by turns overcome with grief and threatening, to resist at once the ascendancy of grief and beauty, it was too much for a visionary, it was too much for a brain weakened by the ardent dreams of an ecstatic faith, it was too much for a heart corroded by the love of heaven that burns, by the hatred of men that devours.

"Who art thou?" cried he, clasping his hands; "art thou a messenger from God, a minister from hell, angel, or demon."

"Do you not know me, Felton? I am neither an angel nor a demon, I am a daughter of earth, I am a sister of thy faith, that is all."

"Yes! yes!" said Felton, "I doubted, but now I believe!"

"You believe, and still you are an accomplice of that child of Belial, who is called Lord Winter! You believe, and yet you leave me in the hands of my enemies, of the enemy of England, of the enemy of God! You believe, and yet you deliver me up to him who fills and defiles the world with his heresies and debaucheries; to that infamous Sardanapalus, whom the blind call the Duke of Buckingham, and whom true believers name Antichrist!"

"I deliver you up to Buckingham! I! what mean you by that?"

"They have eyes," cried My Lady, "and they will not see; they have ears, and they will not hear."

"Yes! yes!" said Felton, passing his hands over his brow, covered with sweat, as if to remove his last doubt; "yes, I recognize the voice which speaks to me in my dreams; yes, I recognize the features of the angel that appears to me every night, crying to my soul, which cannot sleep: 'Strike, save England, and thyself, lest thou diest without having disarmed God!'—Speak! speak!" cried Felton, "I can understand you now."

"Confide my shame to you," cried My Lady, with the blush of modesty upon her countenance—"for often the crime of one becomes the shame of another; confide my shame to you, a man, and I, a woman! Oh!" continued she, placing her hand modestly over her beautiful eyes, "never! never!—I could not!"

"But to a brother!" said Felton.

My Lady looked at him for some time with an expression which the young man took for doubt, but which, however, was nothing but observation, or rather the will to fascinate.

Felton, in his turn a suppliant, clasped his hands.

"Well then," said My Lady, "I confide in my brother, I will dare to——"

At this moment the steps of Lord Winter were heard; but this time the terrible brother-in-law did not content himself, as on the preceding day, with passing before the door and going away again; he stopped, exchanged two words with the sentinel, then the door opened, and he appeared.

During these two words, Felton drew back suddenly, and when Lord Winter entered, he stood several paces from the prisoner.

The baron entered slowly, carrying a scrutinizing glance from the lady to the young officer.

"You have been a long time here, John," said he, "has this woman been relating her crimes to you? In that case I can comprehend the length of the conversation."

Felton started, and My Lady felt she was lost if she did not come to the assistance of the disconcerted Puritan.

"Ah! you fear your prisoner should escape," said she; "well ask your worthy jailer what favor I was but this instant soliciting of him."

"You were soliciting a favor?" said the baron suspiciously.

"Yes, my lord," replied the young man, in some confusion.

"And what favor, pray?" asked Lord Winter.

"A knife, which she would return to me a minute after she had received it," replied Felton.

"Is some one concealed here, whose throat this amiable lady is desirous of cutting," said Winter, in an ironical, contemptuous tone.

"There is myself," replied My Lady.

"I have given you the choice between America and Tyburn," replied Lord Winter, "choose Tyburn, My Lady; believe me, the cord is more certain than the knife."

Felton grew pale, and made a step forward.

Lord Winter perceived this emotion.

"Mistrust yourself, John," said he; "I have placed reliance upon you, my friend; beware! I have warned you! But be of good courage, my lad, in three or four days we shall be delivered from this creature, and where I shall send her to, she can hurt nobody."

"You hear him!" cried My Lady with vehemence, so that the baron might believe she was addressing heaven, and that Felton might understand she was addressing him.

Felton hung down his head and appeared buried in thought.

The baron took the young officer by the arm, turning his head over his shoulder, so as not to lose sight of My Lady till he was gone out.

"My God!" said she, "what a senseless fanatic! my God, it is I, I and he who will help me to avenge myself."

CHAPTER LIII.

THE CONFESSION.

My Lady had however achieved a half-triumph, and the success obtained doubled her strength.

My Lady, being well prepared for the reception of Felton, was able to plant her batteries. She now had only two days left; when once the order was signed by Buckingham, the baron would make her embark immediately.

She should certainly return from her exile—she did not doubt that a single instant; but how long might this exile last? For an active, ambitious nature, days not spent in mounting are inauspicious days! what word, then, can be found to describe those in which they descend? To lose a year, two, three years, is to talk of an eternity; to return after the death or disgrace of the Cardinal, perhaps; to return when d'Artagnan and his friends, happy and triumphant, should have received from the Queen the reward they had well acquired by the services they had rendered her—these were devouring ideas that a woman like My Lady could not endure. For the rest, the storm which raged within her doubled her strength, and she would have burst the walls of her prison if her body had been able to take for a single instant the proportions of her mind.

Then that which spurred her on additionally in the midst of all this was the remembrance of the Cardinal. What must that mistrustful, restless, suspicious one think of her silence; the Cardinal, not merely her only support, prop, and protector in the present, but still further, the principal instrument of her future fortune and vengeance? She knew him—she knew that at her return it would be in vain to tell him of her imprisonment, in vain to enlarge upon the sufferings she had undergone—the Cardinal would reply, with the sarcastic calmness of the skeptic, strong at once by power and genius, "You should not have allowed yourself to be taken."

Time, however, passed away.

At ten o'clock, Felton came and placed the sentinel; My Lady recognized his step. She was as well acquainted with it now as a mistress is with that of the lover of her heart, and yet My Lady at the same time detested and despised this weak fanatic.

That was not the appointed hour—Felton would not come in.

Two hours after, as the clock struck twelve, the sentinel was relieved.

This time it was the hour, and from this moment My Lady waited with impatience.

The new sentinel commenced his walk in the corridor.

At the expiration of ten minutes Felton entered My Lady's apartment. She arose.

"You are come, then!" said she.

"I promised you I would come," said Felton, "and I am come."

"You promised me other things besides."

"What? my God!" said the young man, who, in spite of his self-command, felt his knees tremble, and the sweat start from his brow.

"You promised to bring a knife, and to leave it with me after our conversation."

"Here is the knife!" said Felton, drawing from his pocket the weapon which, according to his promise, he had brought, but which he hesitated to give to the prisoner.

"Let me see it," said My Lady.

Felton held the weapon to My Lady, who examined the temper of it attentively, and who tried the point on the tip of her finger.

"Well," said she, returning the knife to the young officer, "this is fine and good steel; you are a faithful friend, Felton."

Felton took back the weapon, and laid it upon the table, as had been agreed.

My Lady followed him with her eyes, unable to refrain from a gesture of satisfaction.

"Now," said she, "listen to me."

The recommendation was useless; the young officer stood upright before her, awaiting her words, as if to devour them.

"Felton," said My Lady, with a solemnity full of melancholy, "if your sister, the daughter of your father, said to you:

"Still young, unfortunately handsome, I was dragged into a snare, I resisted; ambushes and violences were multiplied around me, I resisted; the religion I serve, the God I adore, were blasphemed because I called upon that religion and that God; I resisted; then outrages were heaped upon me, and as my soul was not subdued, it was determined to defile my body forever. In short——"

My Lady stopped, and a bitter smile passed over her lips.

"In short," said Felton, "in short, what did they do?"

"At length, one evening, my enemy resolved to paralyze the resistance he could not conquer; one evening he mixed a powerful narcotic with my water. Scarcely had I finished my repast, when I felt myself sink by degrees into a strange torpor.

"Of all that passed in that sleep, or the time which glided away whilst it lasted, I have no remembrance; the only thing I recollect is, that I awoke in bed, in a round chamber, the furniture of which was sumptuous, and into which light only penetrated by an opening in the ceiling. No door gave entrance to the room; it might be called a magnificent prison.

"Certainly, I was not the first captive that had been shut up in this splendid prison; but you may easily comprehend, Felton, that the more superb the prison the greater was my terror.

"No noise from without, by which I could measure the time, reached me; I only supposed it must be seven or eight o'clock in the evening, for we were in the month of October, and it was quite dark.

"All at once, the noise of a door turning on its hinges made me start; a globe of fire appeared above the glazed opening of the ceiling, casting a strong light into my chamber, and I per-

ceived with terror that a man was standing within a few paces of me.

"A table, with two covers, bearing a supper ready prepared, stood as if by magic, in the middle of the apartment.

"That man was he who had pursued me during a whole year, who had vowed my dishonor, and who, by the first words that issued from his mouth, gave me to understand he had accomplished it the preceding night."

"Infamous villain!" murmured Felton.

"Oh, yes, infamous villain!" cried My Lady, seeing the interest which the young officer, whose soul seemed to hang on her lips, took in this strange recital.

"Tell me who this man was!" cried the young officer.

My Lady saw at a single glance all the painful feelings she inspired in Felton, by dwelling on every detail of her recital; but she would not spare him a single pang. The more profoundly she wounded his heart, the more certainly he would avenge her. She continued, then, as if she had not heard his exclamation, or as if she thought the moment was not yet come to reply to it.

"Only this time it was no longer an inert body, without feeling, that the villain had to deal with; I have told you that, without being able to regain the complete exercise of my faculties, I retained the sense of my danger. I struggled, then, with all my strength, and doubtless opposed, weak as I was, a long resistance, for I heard him cry out:

"'These miserable Puritans! I knew very well that they tired out their executioners, but I did not think they had been so strong against their lovers! Come! come, calm yourself, my sweet girl! I thought you were become kinder. I am not one of those tyrants who detain women by force. You don't love me; with my usual conceit, I doubted of it; now I am convinced. To-morrow you shall be free.'

"I had but one wish, and that was that he should kill me.

"'Beware!' said I, 'for my liberty is your dishonor.'

"'Explain yourself, my pretty Sibyl.'

"'Yes; for no sooner shall I have left this place, than I shall tell everything; I will proclaim the violence you have used towards me; I will describe my captivity; I will denounce this palace of infamy. You are placed on high, my lord, but tremble! Above you there is the King; above the King there is God!'

"However perfect master he was over himself, my persecutor allowed a movement of anger to escape him. I could not see the expression of his countenance, but I felt the arm upon which my hand was placed, tremble.

"'Then you shall not leave this place,' said he, 'until you take a little oath for me on the cross; I won't ask anything more of you.'

"'Upon the cross,' cried I, rising up, for at that abhorred voice I had recovered all my strength; 'upon the cross! I swear that no promise, no menace, no force, no torture shall close my

mouth; upon the cross! I swear to denounce you everywhere as a murderer, as a despoiler of honor, as a base coward; upon the cross! I swear, if I ever leave this place, to call down vengeance upon you from the whole human race.'

"'Beware!' said the voice, in a threatening accent that I had never yet heard, 'I have an extraordinary means, which I will not employ but in the last extremity, to close your mouth, or at least to prevent any one from believing a word you may utter. Threaten to speak, and I will condemn you to interminable, ineffaceable infamy!"

"'You,' repeated I. Oh! I declare to you, Felton, I thought him mad!

"'Yes, I!' replied he.

"'Oh! leave me,' said I, 'begone, if you do not desire to see me dash my head against that wall, before your eyes!'

"'Very well; it is your own doing; till to-morrow evening, then!'

"'Till to-morrow evening, then,' replied I, allowing myself to fall, and biting the carpet with rage."

After a moment of silence employed by My Lady in observing the young man who listened to her, My Lady continued her recital:

"It was nearly three days since I had eaten or drunk anything, I suffered frightful torments; at times there passed before me clouds which pressed my brow, which veiled my eyes; this was delirium.

"When the evening came, I was so weak that at every time that I fainted I thanked God, for I thought I was about to die.

"In the midst of one of these faintings, I heard the door open; terror recalled me to myself.

"He entered the apartment, followed by a man in a mask; he was masked likewise; but I knew his step, I knew his voice, I knew him by that imposing carriage that hell has bestowed upon his person for the curse of humanity.

"'Well!' said he to me, 'have you made your mind up to take the oath I have requested of you?'

"'You have said it, Puritans have but one word; mine you have heard, and that is to pursue you on earth to the tribunal of men, in heaven to the tribunal of God.'

"Then, addressing the man who accompanied him:

"'Executioner,' said he, 'do your duty.'"

"Oh! his name, his name!" cried Felton, "tell it me!"

"Then, in spite of my cries, in spite of my resistance, for I began to comprehend that there was a question of something worse than death, the executioner seized me, threw me on the floor, fastened me with his bonds, and suffocated my sobs. Almost without sense, invoking God, who did not listen to me, I uttered all at once a frightful cry of pain and shame; a burning fire, a red-hot iron, the iron of the executioner was imprinted on my shoulder."

Felton uttered a groan.

"Here," said My Lady, rising with the majesty of a queen—"here, Felton, behold the new martyrdom invented for a pure young girl, the victim of the brutality of a villain. Learn to know the heart of men, and henceforth make yourself less easily the instrument of their unjust vengeances."

My Lady, with a rapid gesture, opened her robe, tore the cambric that covered her bosom, and red with feigned anger and simulated shame, showed the young man the ineffaceable impression which dishonored that beautiful shoulder.

"But," cried Felton, "that is a fleur-de-lis which I see there."

"And therein consisted the infamy," replied My Lady. "The brand of England—it would be necessary to prove what tribunal had imposed it on me, and I could have made a public appeal to all the tribunals of the kingdom; but the brand of France——oh! by it, by it I was really branded indeed!"

This was too much for Felton.

Pale, motionless, overwhelmed by this frightful revelation, dazzled by the superhuman beauty of this woman, who unveiled herself before him with an immodesty which appeared to him sublime, he ended by falling on his knees before her, as the early Christians did before those pure and holy martyrs whom the persecution of the emperors gave up in the circus to the sanguinary lubricity of the populace. The brand disappeared, the beauty alone remained.

"Pardon! Pardon!" cried Felton, "oh! pardon me for having joined with your persecutors."

My Lady held out her hand to him.

"So beautiful! so young!" cried Felton, covering that hand with his kisses.

My Lady let one of those looks fall upon him which make a slave of a king.

He no longer loved her, he adored her.

When this crisis was past; when My Lady appeared to have resumed her self-possession, which she had never lost; when Felton had seen her cover again, with the veil of chastity, those treasures of love which were only concealed from him to make him desire them the more ardently, he said:

"Ah! now," said he, "I have only one thing to ask of you, that is, the name of your true executioner, for, for me there is but one; the other was an instrument, that was all."

"The truly guilty," said My Lady, "is the ravager of England, the persecutor of true believers, the base ravisher of the honor of so many women; he who, to satisfy a caprice of his corrupt heart, is about to make England shed so much blood, who protects the Protestants to-day and will betray them to-morrow——"

"Buckingham! it is, then, Buckingham!" cried Felton, in a high state of exasperation.

My Lady concealed her face in her hands, as if she could not endure the shame which this name recalled to her.

"But he will draw down upon his head the punishment reserved

for the damned!" said Felton, with increasing warmth; "he wills that human vengeance should precede heavenly justice."

"Men fear him and spare him."

"I!" said Felton, "I do not fear him, nor will I spare him!"

The soul of My Lady was as if bathed in an infernal joy.

"But how can Lord Winter, my protector, my father," asked Felton, "possibly be mixed up with all this?"

"Listen, Felton," resumed My Lady, "for by the side of base and contemptible men there are often found great and generous natures. I had an affianced husband, a man whom I loved, and who loved me; a heart like yours, Felton, a man like you. I went to him and told him all; he knew me, that man did, and did not doubt an instant. He was a nobleman, a man equal to Buckingham, in every respect. He said nothing; he only girded on his sword, enveloped himself in his cloak, and went straight to Buckingham Palace."

"Yes, yes," said Felton; "I understand how he would act; but with such men it is not the sword, it is the dagger that should be employed."

"Buckingham had left England the day before, sent ambassador to Spain, to demand the hand of the Infanta for King Charles I., who was then only Prince of Wales. My affianced husband returned.

"'Hear me,' said he; 'this man is gone, and for the moment has, consequently, escaped my vengeance; but let us be united, as we were to have been, and then leave it to Lord Winter to maintain his own honor and that of his wife."

"Lord Winter!" cried Felton.

"Yes," said My Lady, "Lord Winter; and now you can understand it all, can you not? Buckingham remained nearly a year absent. A week before his return Lord Winter died, leaving my infant son his sole heir. Whence came the blow? God knows all, knows without doubt; but as for me, I accuse nobody."

"Oh! what an abyss! what an abyss!" cried Felton.

"Lord Winter died without revealing anything to his brother. The terrible secret was to be concealed till it burst, like a clap of thunder, over the head of the guilty. Your protector had seen with pain this marriage of his elder brother with a portionless girl. I was sensible that I could look for no support from a man disappointed in his hopes of an inheritance. I went to France, with a determination to remain there for the rest of my life. But all my fortune is in England. Communication being closed by the war, I was in want of everything. I was then obliged to come back again. Six days ago I landed at Portsmouth."

"Well?" said Felton.

"Well, Buckingham heard by some means, no doubt, of my return. He spoke of me to Lord Winter, already prejudiced against me; and told him that his sister-in-law was a branded woman. The noble and pure voice of my husband was no longer there to defend me. Lord Winter believed all that was told him,

with so much the more facility, from its being his interest to believe it. He caused me to be arrested, had me conducted hither, and placed me under your guard. You know the rest. The day after tomorrow he banishes me, he transports me; the day after to-morrow he exiles me among the infamous. Oh! the scheme is well laid! the plot is clever! my honor will not survive it! You see, then, Felton, I can do nothing but die! Felton, give me that knife!"

"No, no," said he, "no, you shall live honored and pure, you shall live to triumph over your enemies."

My Lady put him from her slowly, with her hand, whilst drawing him nearer with her look; but Felton, in his turn, embraced her more closely, imploring her like a divinity.

"Oh, death! death!" said she, lowering her voice and her eyelids. She ran to the table, and seizing the knife which Felton had laid down—

"And by what right will you prevent me from dying?" said she.

"Great God!" exclaimed Felton, on seeing the knife glitter in her hand.

At that moment a burst of ironical laughter resounded through the corridor. The baron, attracted by the noise, in his dressing gown, his sword under his arm, stood in the doorway.

"Ho, ho!" said he; "here we are arrived at the last act of the tragedy. You see, Felton, the drama has gone through all the phases I named; but be at ease, no blood will flow."

My Lady perceived that all was lost unless she gave Felton an immediate and terrible proof of her courage.

"You are mistaken, my lord, blood will flow; and may that blood fall back on those who cause it to flow!"

Felton uttered a cry, and rushed toward her; he was too late; My Lady had stabbed herself.

But the knife had fortunately, we ought to say skilfully, come in contact with the steel busk, which at that period, like a cuirass, defended the chests of the women; it had glided down it, tearing the robe, and had penetrated slantingly between the flesh and the ribs.

My Lady's robe was not the less stained with blood in a second.

Felton snatched away the knife.

"See, my lord," said he, in a deep, gloomy tone, "here is a woman who was under my guard, and who has killed herself!"

"Be at ease, Felton," said Lord Winter, "she is not dead; demons do not die so easily. Be at ease, and go and wait for me in my chamber."

"But, my lord——"

"Go, sir, I command you."

At this injunction from his superior, Felton obeyed; but, in going out, he put the knife into his bosom.

As to Lord Winter, he contented himself with calling the woman, and when she was come, he recommended the prisoner, who was still fainting, to her care, and left her alone with her.

But as, all things considered, notwithstanding his suspicions, the wound might be serious, he immediately sent off a man and horse to fetch a doctor.

CHAPTER LIV.

THE ESCAPE.

TOWARD four o'clock in the morning, the doctor arrived; but since the time My Lady had stabbed herself, however short, the wound had closed. The doctor could, therefore, measure neither the direction nor the depth of it; he only satisfied himself that by My Lady's pulse, the case was not serious.

In the morning, My Lady, under the pretence of not having slept well in the night, and wanting rest, sent away the woman who attended her.

She had one hope; which was, that Felton would appear at the breakfast hour; but Felton did not come.

Were her fears realized? Was Felton, suspected by the baron, about to fail her at the decisive moment? She had only one day left. Lord Winter had announced her embarkation for the 23d, and it was now the morning of the 22d.

Nevertheless, she still waited patiently till the hour for dinner.

Although she had eaten nothing in the morning, the dinner was brought in at its usual time; My Lady then perceived with terror that the uniform of the soldiers that guarded her was changed.

Then she ventured to ask what had become of Felton.

She was told that he had left the castle an hour before on horseback. She inquired if the baron was still at the castle. The soldier replied that he was, and that he had given orders to be informed if the prisoner wished to speak to him.

My Lady replied that she was too weak at present, and that her only desire was to be left alone.

Felton was sent away; the marines were removed; Felton was, then, mistrusted!

This was the last blow to the prisoner.

The supper was served; My Lady felt that she stood in need of all her strength; she did not know what might take place during this night, which approached so menacingly; for large masses of cloud rolled over the face of the heavens, and distant lightning announced a storm.

The storm came on about ten o'clock: My Lady felt a consolation in seeing nature partake of the disorder of her heart.

All at once she heard a tap at her window, and by the help of a flash of lightning she saw the face of a man appear behind the bars.

She ran to the window and opened it.

"Felton!" cried she; "I am saved?"

"Yes!" said Felton; "but be silent! I must have time to file these bars. But will you come?"

"I am ready."

When called, she mounted upon a chair, and passed the upper part of her person through the window; she saw the young officer suspended over the abyss by a ladder of ropes. For the first time, an emotion of terror reminded her that she was a woman. The dark space frightened her.

"I expected this," said Felton, who tied her two wrists together with a handkerchief, and then over the handkerchief with a cord.

"Pass your arms around my neck, and fear nothing."

"But I shall make you lose your balance, and we shall both be dashed to pieces."

"Don't be afraid; I am a sailor."

Not a second was to be lost; My Lady passed her arms around Felton's neck, and let herself slip out of the window. Felton began to descend the ladder slowly, step by step; notwithstanding the weight of their bodies, the blast of the hurricane made them wave in the air.

"Now," said Felton, "we are safe!"

My Lady breathed a deep sigh and fainted.

Felton continued to descend. When arrived at the bottom of the ladder, and he found no more support for his feet, he clung with his hands; at length, arrived at the last step, he hung by his hands and touched the ground. He took My Lady in his arms and set off briskly across the rocks, and when arrived on the edge of the sea, whistled.

A similar signal replied to him, and five minutes after, a boat appeared, rowed by four men.

A black point floated on the sea—it was a sloop.

Whilst the boat was advancing to it with all the speed its four rowers could give it, Felton untied the cord, and then the handkerchief which bound My Lady's hands together. When her hands were loosed, he took some sea-water and sprinkled it over her face.

My Lady breathed a sigh and opened her eyes.

"Where am I?" said she.

"Saved," replied the young officer.

They drew near to the sloop. A sailor on watch hailed the boat, the boat replied.

"What vessel is that?" asked My Lady.

"The one I have hired for you."

"Where is it to take me to?"

"Where you please, after you have put me on shore at Portsmouth."

"What are you going to do at Portsmouth?" asked My Lady.

"To accomplish the orders of Lord Winter," said Felton, with a gloomy smile. "As he mistrusted me, he determined to guard you himself, and sent me in his place to get Buckingham to sign the order for your transportation. I have no time to lose; to-morrow is the 23d, and Buckingham sets sail to-morrow with his fleet for La Rochelle."

"He must not sail!" cried My Lady, forgetting her usual presence of mind.

"Be satisfied," replied Felton; "he will not sail."

My Lady started with joy; she could read to the depths of the heart of this young man; the death of Buckingham was there written at full length.

"Felton——" cried she; "you are as great as Judas Maccabeus! If you die, I will die with you; that is all I am able to say to you."

"Silence!" cried Felton; "we are arrived."

An instant after they were on the deck.

"Captain," said Felton, "this is the person of whom I spoke to you, and whom you must convey safe and sound to France."

"For a thousand pistoles," said the captain.

"Well!" said My Lady, "if you keep your word, instead a thousand pistoles, I will double it."

"Hurrah! for you, then, my pretty lady," cried the captain; "and may heaven often send me such passengers as your ladyship."

"In the meanwhile," said Felton, "convey me to the little bay, where you know it was agreed you should put in."

Towards seven o'clock in the morning the little vessel cast anchor in the bay that had been named.

It was agreed that My Lady should wait for Felton till ten o'clock; if he did not return by ten o'clock, she was to sail without him.

In that case, and supposing he was at liberty, he was to rejoin her in France, at the Convent of the Carmelites, at Bethune.

CHAPTER LV.

WHAT TOOK PLACE AT PORTSMOUTH.

As long as Felton remained in the boat which conveyed him to land, he kept his face towards My Lady, who, standing on the deck, followed him with her eyes. Both felt relieved from the fear of pursuit; nobody ever came into My Lady's apartment before nine o'clock; and it would require three hours to go from the castle to London.

Felton jumped on shore, climbed the little ascent which led to the top of the beach, saluted My Lady a last time, and took his course towards the town.

Felton entered Portsmouth about eight o'clock in the morning; the whole population was on foot; drums were beating in the streets and in the port; the troops about to be embarked were marching towards the sea.

Felton arrived at the palace of the Admiralty, covered with dust, and streaming with perspiration. His countenance, usually so pale, was purple with heat and passion. The sentinel

wanted to repulse him, but Felton called to the officer of the post, and drawing from his pocket the letter of which he was the bearer—

"A pressing message from Lord Winter," said he.

At the name, known to be of one of his Grace's most intimate friends, the officer of the post gave orders for Felton to be allowed to pass, who, besides, wore the uniform of a naval officer.

Felton darted into the palace.

At the moment he entered the vestibule, another man was entering likewise, covered with dust, and out of breath, leaving at the gate a post-horse, which, as soon as he had alighted from it, sank down exhausted.

Felton and he addressed Patrick, the duke's confidential valet-de-chambre, at the same moment. Felton named Lord Winter, the unknown would not name anybody, and asserted that it was to the duke alone he would make himself known. Each was anxious to gain admission before the other.

Patrick, who knew Lord Winter was in affairs of duty and in relations of friendship with the duke, gave the preference to him who came in his name. The other was forced to wait, and it was easily to be seen how he cursed the delay.

The valet-de-chambre led Felton through a large hall, in which waited the deputies from La Rochelle, headed by the Prince de Soubise, and introduced him into a closet, where Buckingham, just out of the bath, was finishing his toilet, on which, as at all times, he bestowed extraordinary attention.

"Lieutenant Felton, on the part of the Lord Winter," said Patrick.

"From Lord Winter!" repeated Buckingham; "let him come in." Felton entered. At the moment Buckingham was throwing upon a couch a rich robe-de-chambre worked with gold, to put on a blue velvet doublet embroidered with pearls.

"Why did not the baron come himself?" demanded Buckingham; "I expected him this morning."

"My lord," said Felton; "Baron Winter wrote to you the other day to request you to sign an order of embarkation relative to a young woman named Charlotte Backson."

"Yes, sir, and I answered him, that if he would bring or send me that order, I would sign it."

"Here it is, my lord."

"Give it to me," said the duke.

And, taking it from Felton, he cast a rapid glance over the paper, and perceiving that it was the one that had been mentioned to him he placed it on the table, took a pen, and prepared to sign it.

"I ask your pardon, my lord," said Felton, stopping the duke; "but does your Grace know that the name of Charlotte Backson is not the true name of this young woman?"

"Yes, sir, I do know it," replied the duke, dipping the pen in the ink.

"Then your Grace knows her real name?" asked Felton, in a sharp tone.

"Yes, I know that too;" and the duke put the pen to the paper. Felton grew pale.

"And knowing that real name, my lord," replied Felton; "will you sign it all the same?"

"Doubtless, I will," said Buckingham, "and rather twice than once."

"I cannot believe," continued Felton, in a voice that became more sharp and rough, "that your Grace knows that it is to Lady Winter this relates."

"Do you know, sir, that you are asking me very strange questions, and that it is very silly, on my part, to answer them?"

"Reply to them, my lord," said Felton; "the circumstances are more serious than perhaps you imagine."

Buckingham reflected that the young man, coming from Lord Winter, perhaps spoke in his name, and softened his manner a little.

"Doubtless, without any remorse," said he, "the baron knows, as well as myself, that Lady Winter is a very guilty woman, and it is treating her very favorably to remit her punishment to transportation."

The duke put his pen to the paper again.

"You will not sign that order, my lord!" said Felton, making a step towards the duke. "Lady Winter is an angel; you know that, and I demand her liberty of you."

"Why, the man must be mad to talk to me in this manner!" said Buckingham. "Master Felton, you will please to withdraw, and place yourself under arrest immediately."

"You shall hear me to the end, my lord. You seduced this girl, you outraged, defiled her! but repair your crimes towards her, let her go free, and I will require nothing else of you."

"You will require!" said Buckingham, looking at Felton with astonishment, and dwelling upon each syllable of the words as he pronounced them.

"My lord," continued Felton, becoming more excited as he spoke; "my lord, beware! all England is tired of your iniquities; my lord, you have abused the royal power, which you have almost usurped; my lord, you are held in horror by God and men; God will punish you hereafter, but I will punish you here!"

"Well! this is too much!" cried Buckingham, making a step towards the door.

Felton barred his passage.

"Sign, my lord, sign the liberation of Lady Winter," said Felton, holding a paper to the duke.

"What, by force! you are joking! hilloa! Patrick!"

"Sign, my lord!"

"Who waits there?" cried the duke aloud, and at the same time sprang towards his sword.

But Felton did not give him time to draw it; he held the knife

with which My Lady had stabbed herself, open in his bosom; at one bound he was upon the duke.

At that moment Patrick entered the room, crying:

"A letter from France, my lord."

"From France!" cried Buckingham, forgetting everything on thinking from whom that letter came.

Felton took advantage of this moment, and plunged the knife into his side up to the handle.

"Ah! traitor!" cried Buckingham, "thou hast killed me!"

"Murder!" screamed Patrick.

Felton cast his eyes round for means of escape, and seeing the door free, he rushed into the next chamber, in which, as we said, the deputies from La Rochelle were waiting, crossed it as quickly as possible, and precipitated himself towards the staircase; but upon the first step he met Lord Winter, who, seeing him pale, confused, livid, and stained with blood both on his hands and face, seized him, crying:

"I knew it! I guessed it! but too late by a minute, unfortunate, unfortunate that I am!"

Felton made no resistance; Lord Winter placed him in the hands of the guards, who led him, whilst awaiting fresh orders, to a little terrace looking out upon the sea; and then the baron hastened to the duke.

At the cry uttered by the duke and the scream of Patrick, the man whom Felton had met in the antechamber rushed into the closet.

He found the duke reclining upon a sofa, with his hand pressed upon the wound.

"Laporte," said the duke in a faint voice, "Laporte, do you come from her?"

"Yes, monseigneur," replied the faithful cloak-bearer of Anna of Austria; "but too late perhaps."

"Silence! Laporte, you may be overheard; Patrick, let no one enter; oh! I cannot tell what she says to me! my God! I am dying!"

And the duke fainted.

In the meanwhile, Lord Winter, the deputies, the leaders of the expedition, the officers of Buckingham's household, had all made their way into the chamber: cries of despair resounded on all sides. The news which filled the palace with tears and groans soon became known, and was spread throughout the city.

The report of a cannon announced that something new and unexpected had taken place.

Lord Winter tore his hair in agony.

The duke, however, was not dead; he recovered a little, opened his eyes, and hope revived in all hearts.

"Gentlemen," said he, "leave me alone with Patrick and Laporte—"

The baron went out sobbing with grief.

There only remained in the closet of the wounded duke, La-

porte and Patrick. A doctor was being sought for, but none was yet found.

"Live, my lord, you will live!" repeated the faithful servant of Anna of Austria, on his knees before the duke's sofa.

"What has she written to me?" said Buckingham, feebly, streaming with blood, and suppressing his agony to speak of her he loved; "what has she written to me? read me her letter."

Laporte read:

MY LORD:—By that which, since I have known you, I have suffered by you and for you, I conjure you, if you have any care for my repose, to interrupt those great armaments which you are preparing against France, to put an end to a war, of which it is publicly said, religion is the ostensible cause, and of which, it is generally whispered, your love for me is the concealed and real cause. This war may not only bring great catastrophes upon England and France, but misfortunes upon you, for which I should never console myself.

Be careful of your life, which is menaced, and which will be dear to me from the moment I am not obliged to see an enemy in you.

Your affectionate

ANNA.

"And is that all? is that all?" Buckingham impatiently said.

"She charged me to tell you that she still loved you."

"Ah!" said Buckingham, "God be praised! my death, then, will not be to her as the death of a stranger!"

Laporte burst into tears.

"Patrick," said the duke, "bring me the casket in which the diamond studs were kept."

Patrick brought the object desired, which Laporte recognized as having belonged to the Queen.

"Now the white satin bag upon which her cipher is embroidered in pearls."

Patrick again obeyed.

"Here, Laporte," said Buckingham; "these are the only remembrances I have received from her, this silver casket and these letters. You will restore them to her Majesty; and as a last memorial" (he looked round for some valuable object) "you will add——"

He still sought; but his eyes, darkened by death, met with nothing but the knife which had fallen from the hand of Felton, still smoking with the blood spread over its blade.

"And you will add to them this knife," said the duke, pressing the hand of Laporte. He had just strength enough to place the bag at the bottom of the silver casket, and to let the knife fall into it, making a sign to Laporte that he was no longer able to speak;—and then, in a last convulsion, with which he had not the power to contend, he slipped off the sofa on the floor.

"Dead! dead!" screamed Patrick.

At this cry all the crowd came again into the apartment, and throughout the palace and town there was nothing but consternation and tumult.

As soon as Lord Winter saw Buckingham was dead, he ran to Felton, whom the soldiers still guarded on the terrace of the

palace. "Miserable wretch!" said he, to the young man, who since the death of Buckingham had regained that coolness and self-possession which never after abandoned him—"miserable wretch! what hast thou done?"

"I have avenged myself!" said he.

"Avenged yourself!" said the baron; "rather say that you have served as an instrument to that accursed woman; but I swear to you, that this crime shall be her last crime."

"I don't know what you mean," replied Felton, quietly; "and I am ignorant of whom you are speaking, my lord: I killed the Duke of Buckingham because he twice refused you yourself to appoint me captain; I have punished him for his injustice, that is all."

Winter, quite stupefied, looked on whilst the soldiers bounds Felton, and could not tell what to think of such insensibility.

One thing alone, however, threw a shade over the pallid brow of Felton. At every noise he heard, the simple Puritan fancied he recognized the step and voice of My Lady coming to throw herself into his arms, to accuse herself, and meet death with him.

All at once he started—his eyes became fixed upon a point of the sea, which the terrace upon which he was overlooked; with the eagle glance of a sailor, he had recognized there, where another would only have seen a gull hovering over the waves, the sail of the sloop, which was directed towards the coast of France.

He grew deadly pale, placed his hand upon his heart, which was breaking, and at once perceived all the treachery.

"One last favor, my lord!" said he, to the baron.

"What is that?" replied his lordship.

"What o'clock is it?"

The baron drew out his watch.

"It wants ten minute to nine."

My Lady had advanced her departure by an hour and a half; as soon as she heard the cannon which announced the fatal event, she had ordered the anchor to be weighed.

The vessel was making way under a blue sky at a great distance from the coast. "God has so willed it!" said he, with the resignation of a fanatic; but without, however, being able to take his eyes from that ship, on board of which he doubtless fancied he could distinguish the white phantom of her to whom he had sacrificed his life.

Winter followed his look, observed his feelings, and guessed all.

"Be punished *alone*, in the first place, miserable man!" said Winter to Felton, who was being dragged away with his eyes turned towards the sea, "but I swear to you, by the memory of my brother whom I loved so much, that your accomplice is not saved."

Felton hung down his head without pronouncing a syllable.

As to Lord Winter, he descended the stairs rapidly, and went straight to the port

CHAPTER LVI.

IN FRANCE AGAIN.

THE first fear of the King of England, Charles I., on learning the death of the duke, was that such terrible news might discourage the Rochellais; he endeavored to conceal it from them as long as possible, closing all the ports of his kingdom.

But as he did not think of giving this order till five hours after the event, that is to say, till two o'clock in the afternoon, two vessels had already left the port: the one bearing, as we know, My Lady, who, already anticipating the event, was further confirmed in that belief by seeing the black flag flying at the masthead of the admiral's ship.

As to the second vessel, we will tell hereafter whom it carried, and how it set sail.

During all this time, nothing fresh occurred in the camp at La Rochelle; only the King, who grew weary everywhere, but perhaps a little more so in the camp than in any other place, resolved to go incognito and spend the festival of St. Louis at St. Germain's, and asked the Cardinal to order him an escort of twenty Musketeers only.

M. de Treville, upon being informed, packed up his portmanteau, and as, without knowing the cause, he knew the great desire and even imperative want of his friends had to return to Paris, he fixed upon them, of course, to form part of the escort.

It must be admitted that this impatience to return towards Paris had for cause the danger which Madame Bonacieux would run of meeting at the Convent of Bethune with her mortal enemy. Aramis, therefore, had written immediately to Marie Michon, the seamstress at Tours who had such fine acquaintances, to obtain from the Queen authority for Madame Bonacieux to leave the convent, and to retire either into Lorraine or Belgium.

It was true that this order would not be of great use to them whilst they were in camp at La Rochelle, that is to say, at the other end of France; therefore, d'Artagnan was going to ask leave of absence of M. de Treville, confiding to him candidly the importance of his departure, when the news was transmitted to him, as well as to his three friends, that the King was about to set out for Paris with an escort of twenty Musketeers, and that they formed part of the escort.

Their joy was great. The lackeys were sent on before with the baggage, and they set out on the morning of the 16th.

At length the escort passed through Paris on the 23d, in the night; the King thanked M. de Treville, and permitted him to distribute leaves of absence for four days, upon condition that the favored parties should not appear in any public place, under penalty of the Bastile.

The four first leaves granted, as may be imagined, were to our four friends. Still further, Athos obtained of M. de Treville

six days instead of four, and introduced into these six days two more nights, for they set out on the 24th, at five o'clock in the evening, and, as a further kindness, M. de Treville post-dated the leave to the 25th in the morning.

"Good Lord!" said d'Artagnan, who, as we have often said, never doubted of anything, "it appears to me that we are making a great trouble of a very simple thing; in two days, and by knocking up two or three horses (which I care little about, as I have plenty of money) I am at Bethune, I present my letter from the Queen to the superior, and I bring back the dear treasure I go to seek, not into Lorraine, not into Belgium, but to Paris, where she will be much better concealed, particularly whilst the Cardinal is at La Rochelle. Well, once returned from the campaign, half by the protection of her cousin, half in favor of what we have personally done for her, we shall obtain from the Queen what we desire. Remain, then, where you are, and do not exhaust yourselves with useless fatigue; myself and Planchet, that is all that such a simple expedition as this requires."

To this Athos replied quietly:

"We, also, have money left; for I have not yet drunk all my share of the diamond, and Porthos and Aramis have not eaten all theirs. We are, therefore, in a condition to knock up four horses as well as one. But consider, d'Artagnan," added he, in a tone so solemn that it made the young man shudder—"consider that Bethune is a city at which the Cardinal has appointed to meet a woman, who, wherever she goes, brings misery with her. If you had only to deal with four men, d'Artagnan, I would allow you to go alone; you have to do with that woman—we will go, and I hope to God that, with our four lackeys, we may be in sufficient number."

"You terrify me, Athos!" cried d'Artagnan; "my God! what do you fear?"

"Everything!" replied Athos.

On the evening of the 25th, as they were entering Arras, and as d'Artagnan was dismounting at the auberge of the Herse d'Or to drink a glass of wine, a horseman came out of the posting-yard, where he had just had a relay, starting off at a gallop, and with a fresh horse, and taking the road to Paris. At the moment he was passing through the gateway into the street, the wind blew open the cloak in which he was enveloped, although it was in the month of August, and lifted his hat, which the traveller seized with his hand at the moment it had left his head, and pulled it down eagerly over his eyes.

D'Artagnan, who had his eyes fixed upon this man, became very pale, and let his glass fall.

"What is the matter, monsieur?" said Planchet. "Oh, come, gentlemen, gentlemen! my master is ill!"

The three friends hastened towards d'Artagnan, but instead of finding him ill, met him running towards his horse. They stopped him at the door.

"Where the devil are you going to now, in this fashion?" cried Athos.

"It is he!" cried d'Artagnan, pale with passion, and with the sweat on his brow—"it is he! let me overtake him! That cursed man, my evil genius, whom I have always met with when threatened by some misfortune—he who accompanied the horrible woman when I met her for the first time—he whom I was seeking when I offended our Athos—he whom I saw on the very morning Madame Bonacieux was carried off! I have seen him! that is he! I recognized him when his cloak blew open!"

"The devil!" said Athos, musingly.

"To horse, gentlemen! to horse! let us pursue him; we shall overtake him!"

"My dear friend," said Aramis, "remember that it is in an opposite direction to that in which we are going, that he has a fresh horse, and ours are fatigued, so that we shall disable our own horses without a chance of overtaking him. Let the man go, d'Artagnan; let us save the woman."

"Master!" cried a stableman, running out and looking after the stranger—"here is a paper which dropped out of your hat!"

"Friend," said d'Artagnan, "a half-pistole for that paper!"

"With great pleasure! here it is!"

The stableman, delighted with the good day's work he had done, went into the yard again; d'Artagnan unfolded the paper.

"Armentieres!" read Porthos—"Armentieres—I don't know such a place."

"And that name of a town or village is written in *her* hand!" cried Athos.

"Come on, then! come on, then!" said d'Artagnan; "let us keep that paper carefully—perhaps I have not thrown away my half-pistole. To horse, my friends! to horse!"

And the four friends galloped off on the road to Bethune.

CHAPTER LVII.

THE CONVENT AT BETHUNE.

GREAT criminals bear about them a kind of predestination which makes them surmount all obstacles and escape all dangers, till the moment which a wearied Providence has marked as the rock of their impious fortunes.

It was thus with My Lady. She passed through the cruisers of both nations, and arrived at Boulogne without accident.

When landing at Portsmouth, My Lady was an Englishwoman, whom the persecutions of the French drove from La Rochelle; when landing at Boulogne, after a two days' passage, she passed for a Frenchwoman, whom the English persecuted at Portsmouth, out of their hatred for France.

My Lady had, likewise, the best of passports—her beauty, noble

appearance, and the liberality with which she distributed her coin. Freed from the usual formalities by the affable smile and gallant manners of an old governor of the port, who kissed her hand, she only remained long enough at Boulogne to put into the post a letter, conceived in the following terms:

To his Eminence the Cardinal de Richelieu, in his camp before Rochelle.
Monseigneur, let your Eminence be reassured: his Grace the Duke of Buckingham *will not set out* for France.
Boulogne, evening of the 25th. LADY C....

P. S.—According to the desire of your Eminence, I am going to the Carmelite Nunnery of Bethune, where I will await your orders.

Accordingly, that same evening, the lady commenced her journey; night overtook her; she stopped, and slept at an auberge; at five o'clock the next morning she again proceeded, and in three hours after entered Bethune.

She inquired for the Carmelites, and went immediately.

The superior came out to her; My Lady showed her the Cardinal's order: the abbess assigned her a chamber, and had breakfast served.

All the past was effaced from the eyes of this woman, and her looks, fixed on the future, beheld nothing but the high fortunes reserved for her by the Cardinal, whom she had so successfully served, without his name being in any way mixed up in the sanguinary affair. The ever-new passions which consumed her gave to her life the appearance of those clouds which float in the heavens, reflecting sometimes azure, sometimes fire, sometimes the opaque blackness of the tempest, and which leave no traces upon the earth behind them but devastation and death.

After breakfast, the abbess came to pay her a visit. There is very little amusement in the cloister, and the good superior was eager to make acquaintance with her new pensioner.

My Lady wished to please the abbess. But she was greatly embarrassed—she did not know whether she was a Royalist or a Cardinalist; she therefore confined herself to a prudent middle course. But the abbess, on her part, maintained a reserve still more prudent, contenting herself with making a profound inclination of the head every time that the fair traveller pronounced the name of his Eminence.

My Lady began to conceive she should soon grow weary of a convent life; she resolved, then, to risk something, in order that she might know how to act afterwards.

She then went on to describe the persecutions exercised by the Cardinal upon his enemies. The abbess only crossed herself, without approving or disapproving.

This confirmed My Lady in her opinion that the abbess was rather a Royalist than a Cardinalist; therefore, she continued, heightening her narrations more and more.

"I am very little acquainted with all these matters," said the abbess, at length; "but however distant from the court we may be, however remote from the interests of the world we may be

placed, we have very sad examples of what you have related; and one of our pensioners has suffered much from the vengeance and persecution of the Cardinal."

"One of your pensioners!" said My Lady; "oh, my God! poor woman, I pity her, then! The Cardinal does not always pursue crimes," said she; "there are certain virtues that he pursues more severely than certain offences."

"Permit me, madame, to express my surprise," said the abbess.

"Upon what occasion?" said My Lady, with the utmost ingenuousness.

"You are the friend of the Cardinal, for he sends you hither, and yet——"

"And yet I speak ill of him," replied My Lady, finishing the thought of the superior.

"At least, you don't speak well of him."

"That is because I am not his friend," said she, sighing, "but his victim!"

"Well, but this letter by which he recommends you to me?"

"Is an order for me to confine myself to a sort of prison, from which he will release me by one of his satellites."

"But why have you not fled?"

"Whither should I go? Do you believe there is a spot on the earth which the Cardinal cannot reach, if he takes the trouble to stretch forth his hand? If I were a man, certainly that would be possible—but what can a woman do? This young pensioner of yours, has she endeavored to fly?"

"No, that is true; but she—that is another thing, for I believe she is detained in France by some love-affair."

"Ah," said My Lady, with a sigh, "if she is in love, she is not altogether wretched."

"Then," said the abbess, looking at her with increasing interest, "I behold another poor persecuted woman? Be reassured; the house in which you are shall not be a very hard prison, and we will do all in our power to make you in love with your captivity. You will find here, moreover, the young woman of whom I spoke, who is persecuted, no doubt, in consequence of some court intrigue. She is amiable and well behaved."

"What is her name?"

"She was sent to me by some one of high rank, under the name of Kitty. I have not endeavored to discover her other name."

My Lady smiled to herself at the idea which had occurred to her, that this might be her old waiting-maid. There was connected with the remembrance of this girl a remembrance of anger; and a desire of vengeance disordered the features of My Lady, but which, however, immediately recovered the calm and benevolent expression which this woman of a hundred faces had for a moment allowed them to lose.

"And when can I see this young lady, for whom I already feel so great a sympathy?" asked My Lady.

"Why, this evening," said the abbess: "to-day even. But you have been travelling these four days, as you told me: this morn-

ing you rose at five o'clock; you must stand in need of repose. Go to bed and sleep, at dinner time we will call you."

Although My Lady would very willingly have gone without sleep, sustained as she was by all the excitements that a fresh adventure awakened in her heart, ever thirsting for intrigues, she nevertheless accepted the offer of the superior.

All these hopes were so many sweet thoughts for My Lady; so, rocked by them, she soon fell asleep.

She was awakened by a soft voice, which sounded at the foot of her bed. She opened her eyes, and saw the abbess, accompanied by a young woman, with light hair and a delicate complexion, who fixed upon her a look full of benevolent curiosity.

The face of the young woman was entirely unknown to her; each examined the other with great attention, whilst exchanging the customary compliments; both were very handsome, but of quite different styles of beauty. My Lady, however, smiled on observing that she excelled the young woman by far in her high air and aristocratic bearing. It is true that the habit of a novice, which the young woman wore, was not very advantageous in a contest of this kind.

The abbess introduced them to each other; then, when this formality was gone through, as her duties called her to the church, she left the two young women alone.

The novice, seeing the lady remained in bed, was about to follow the example of the superior; but the lady stopped her.

"How, madame," said she, "I have scarcely seen you, and you already wish to deprive me of your company, upon which I had reckoned a little, I must confess, during the time I have to pass here?"

"No, madame," replied the novice, "only I thought I had chosen my time ill: you were asleep—you are fatigued."

"Well," said My Lady, "what can people who are asleep wish for? a happy awakening. This awakening you have given me; allow me, then, to enjoy it at my ease;" and taking her hand, she drew her towards the chair by the bedside.

The novice sat down.

"How unfortunate I am!" said she; "I have been here six months, without the shadow of an amusement; you arrive, and your presence was likely to afford me delightful company, and I expect, according to all probability, from one moment to another, to leave the convent!"

"I think I learned you had suffered persecutions from the Cardinal," continued My Lady; "that would have been another motive for sympathy between us. Are you also the victim of a treachery?"

"No," said the novice, "but of my devotedness to a woman I loved, for whom I would have laid down my life, for whom I would still do so."

"And who has abandoned you, is that it?"

"I have been sufficiently unjust to believe so; but during the last two or three days I have obtained proof to the contrary, for

which I thank God! for it would have cost me very dear to think she had forgotten me. But you, madame, you appear to be free; and if you were inclined to fly, it only rests with yourself to do so."

"Whither would you have me go, without friends, without money, in a part of France with which I am unacquainted, and where I have never been before."

"Oh!" cried the novice, "as to friends, you would have them wherever you went, you appear so good and so beautiful!"

"That does not prevent," replied My Lady, softening her smile so as to give it an angelic expression, "my being alone or being persecuted."

"Hear me," said the novice; "we must trust in heaven; there always comes a moment when the good you have done pleads your cause before God; and see, perhaps it is a happiness for you, humble and powerless as I am, that you have met with me; for, if I leave this place; well! I have powerful friends, who, after having exerted themselves on my account, may also exert themselves for you."

"Oh! when I said I was alone," said My Lady, hoping to make the novice speak by speaking of herself, "it is not for want of some highly placed friends; but these friends themselves tremble before the Cardinal; the Queen herself does not dare to oppose the terrible Minister: I have proof that her Majesty, notwithstanding her excellent heart, has more than once been obliged to abandon persons who had served her to the anger of his Eminence."

"Trust me, madame, the Queen may appear to have abandoned those persons; but we must not put faith in appearances; the more they are persecuted, the more she thinks of them; and often, when they the least expect it, they receive proofs of a kind remembrance."

"Alas!" said My Lady, "I believe so: the Queen is so good!"

"Oh! you know her, then! that lovely and noble Queen, by your speaking of her thus!" cried the novice, warmly.

"That is to say," replied My Lady, driven into her entrenchments, "that I have not the honor of knowing her personally; but I know a great number of her most intimate friends; I know M. de Treville, for one."

"Oh! why, then, only see!" cried the novice, "we shall soon be well acquainted, almost friends; if you know M. de Treville, you must have visited him?"

"Often!" said My Lady, who having entered this track, and perceiving that falsehood succeeded, was determined to carry it on.

"If you have visited him, you must have met some of his Musketeers?"

"All such as he is in the habit of receiving!" replied My Lady, for whom this conversation began to have a real interest.

"Name a few of those you know, and you will find they are my friends."

"Well!" said My Lady, a little embarrassed, "I know Messieurs de Sauvigny, Courtviron, Ferrusac."

The novice let her speak, but observing she stopped—

"Don't you know," said she, "a gentleman of the name of Athos?"

My Lady became as pale as the sheets in which she was reclining, and mistress as she was of herself, could not help uttering a cry, seizing the hand of the novice, and devouring her with her looks.

"What is the matter? Good God!" asked the poor woman; "have I said anything that has hurt your feelings?"

"No, no; but the name struck me; because I also have known that gentleman, and it appeared strange to me to meet with a person who appears to know him well."

"Oh, yes, well! very well! not only him, but some of his friends; MM. Porthos and Aramis!"

"Indeed! you know them, likewise! I know them," cried My Lady, who began to feel a chill penetrate to her heart.

"Well!" if you know them, you know that they are good and worthy gentlemen; why do you not apply to them, if you stand in need of support?"

"That is to say," stammered My Lady, "I am not really very intimate with any of them; I know them from having heard one of their friends, a M. d'Artagnan, say a great deal about them."

"You know M. d'Artagnan!" cried the novice, in her turn seizing the hands of My Lady, and fixing her eyes upon her.

Then, remarking the strange expression of My Lady's countenance—

"Pardon me, madame," said she, "you know him, by what title?"

"Why," replied My Lady, considerably embarrassed—"why, by the title of friend."

"You are deceiving me, madame," said the novice; "you have been his mistress!"

"It is you who have been his mistress, madame," cried My Lady, in her turn.

"I!" said the novice.

"Yes, you; I know you now: you are Mme. Bonacieux."

The young woman drew back in surprise and terror.

"Oh! do not deny it! answer!" continued My Lady.

"Well! yes, madame!" said the novice; "are we rivals?"

"Oh, no!" cried My Lady, with a tone that admitted no doubt of her truth; "never! never!"

"I believe you," said Mme. Bonacieux, "but why, then, did you cry out so?"

"Can you not understand that M. d'Artagnan, being my friend, might take me into his confidence?"

"Indeed!"

"Do you not perceive that I know all? Your being carried off from the little house at St. Germain, his despair, that of his

friends, and their useless inquiries up to this moment! How could I help being astonished, when, without having the least expectation of such a thing, I meet you face to face—you, of whom we have so often spoken together; you, whom he loves with all his soul; you, whom he had taught me to love before I had seen you! Ah! dear Constance, I have found you, then, I see you at last!"

And My Lady stretched out her arms to Madame Bonacieux, who, convinced by what she had just said, saw nothing in this woman, whom an instant before she had believed to be her rival, but a sincere and devoted friend.

"Oh! pardon me! pardon me!" cried she, sinking upon the shoulders of My Lady; "pardon me! I love him so dearly!"

These two women held each other for an instant in a close embrace. Certes, if My Lady's strength had been equal to her hatred, Madame Bonacieux would have never escaped alive from that embrace.

"Then you know what I have suffered," said Madame Bonacieux, "since he has told you what he has suffered: but to suffer for him is happiness."

My Lady replied mechanically, "Yes, that is happiness."

She was thinking of something else.

"And then," continued Madame Bonacieux, "my punishment is drawing to a close; to-morrow, this evening, perhaps, I shall see him again; and then the past will no longer exist."

"This evening?" asked My Lady, roused from her reverie by these words; "oh, I cannot believe you!"

"Well, read, then!" said the unhappy young woman, in the excess of her pride and joy, presenting a letter.

"Humph! the writing of the Duchess de Chevreuse!" said My Lady to herself. "Ah! I always thought there was some intelligence carried on on that side!" And she greedily read the following few lines:

MY DEAR CHILD:—Hold yourself in readiness. *Our friend* will see you soon, and he will only see you to release you from that imprisonment in which your safety required you should be concealed. Prepare, then, for your departure, and never despair of us.

Our charming Gascon has just proved himself as brave and faithful as ever. Tell him that certain parties are grateful to him for the warning he has given.

"Yes, yes," said My Lady, "the letter is precise. Do you know what that warning was?"

"No; I only suspect he has warned the Queen against some fresh machinations of the Cardinal."

"Yes, that's it, no doubt!" said My Lady, returning the letter to Madame Bonacieux, and allowing her head to sink in a pensive manner upon her bosom.

At that moment the galloping of a horse was heard.

"Oh!" cried Madame Bonacieux, darting to the window; "can it be he!"

My Lady remained still in bed, petrified by surprise; so many

unexpected things happened to her all at once, that for the first time she was at a loss.

"Ho! ho!" murmured she; "can it be he?" And she remained in bed with her eyes fixed.

"Alas! no," said Madame Bonacieux: "it is a man I don't know; and yet he seems to be coming here. Yes, he has checked his horse—he stops at the gate—he rings."

My Lady sprang out of bed, and began to dress herself.

"Hush!" said Madame Bonacieux, "somebody is coming."

In fact, the door opened, and the superior entered.

"Do you come from Boulogne?" demanded she of My Lady.

"Yes, I do," replied she, endeavoring to recover her self-possession; "who wants me?"

"A man who will not tell his name, but who comes from the Cardinal."

"Then let him come in, if you please."

The superior and Madame Bonacieux retired.

My Lady was left alone, with her eyes fixed upon the door. An instant after, the jingling of spurs was heard upon the stairs, steps drew near, the door opened, and a man appeared.

My Lady uttered a cry of joy: this man was the Count de Rochefort, the Cardinal's minion.

CHAPTER LVIII.

TWO VARIETIES OF DEMONS.

"Oh!" cried My Lady and Rochefort together, "is that you?"

"Yes, it is."

"And you come?" asked My Lady.

"From La Rochelle—and you?"

"From England."

"Buckingham?"

"Dead or desperately wounded, as I left without being able to obtain anything of him. A fanatic has just assassinated him."

"Ah!" said Rochefort, with a smile; "this is a fortunate chance—one that will delight his Eminence! Have you informed him of it?"

"I wrote to him from Boulogne. But what brings you here?"

"His Eminence was uneasy, and sent me to inquire after you."

"I only arrived yesterday."

"And what have you been doing since yesterday?"

"I have not lost my time. I have found here that young woman whom the Queen took out of prison."

"The mistress of that fellow, d'Artagnan?"

"Yes, Madame Bonacieux, with whose retreat the Cardinal was unacquainted."

"Upon my word!" said Rochefort, "here is a chance that may

be paired with the other! Truly, our Cardinal is a privileged man!"

"Imagine my astonishment," continued My Lady, "when I found myself face to face with this woman?"

"Does she know you?"

"No."

"Then she looks upon you as a stranger?"

My Lady smiled.

"I am her best friend."

"Upon my honor, it is only you, my fair countess, that can perform such miracles!"

"And it is well I can, chevalier," said My Lady; "for do you know she is about to be taken away to-morrow, or the day after, on an order from the Queen by d'Artagnan and his friends."

"They certainly will go so far, we shall be obliged to put them into the Bastile at last."

"Why is it not done already?"

"Why, because the Cardinal has a weakness with respect to these men which I cannot at all account for."

"Well, then! tell him this, Rochefort: tell him that our conversation at the Red Dovecote was overheard by these four men; tell him that, after his departure, one of them came up to me, and took from me, by violence, the safe-conduct which he had given me; tell him they warned Lord Winter of my passage to England; that this time they had nearly made me fail in my mission, as they did in the affair of the studs; tell him that among these four men, two only are to be feared,—d'Artagnan and Athos; tell him that the third, Aramis, is the lover of Madame de Chevreuse; he may be left alone, we know his secret, and it may be useful; as to the fourth, Porthos, he is a fool, a simpleton, a blustering booby, not worth troubling himself about.

"But these four men must be now at the siege of La Rochelle!"

"I thought so too, but a letter which Madame Bonacieux has received and had the imprudence to show me leads me to believe that these four men, on the contrary, are on the road hither to take her away."

"The devil! what's to be done?"

"What did the Cardinal say with respect to me?"

"I was to take your despatches, written or verbal, to return post; and when he shall know what you have done, he will think of what you have to do."

"Then I must wait here or in this neighborhood?"

"Only tell me beforehand, where will you wait for commands from the Cardinal? let me know always where to find you."

"But, observe, it is probable I may not be able to remain here. My enemies may arrive at any minute."

"That's true; but then, is this little woman to escape his Eminence?"

"Bah!" said My Lady, with a smile that only belonged to herself, "did not I tell you I was her best friend?"

"Ah! that's true, likewise; I may then tell the Cardinal, with respect to this little minx—"

"That he may be at ease."

"Is that all?"

"Set off back again directly; it appears to me that the news you hear is worth the trouble of a little diligence. In passing through Lilliers send me your chaise, with an order to your servant to place himself at my disposal."

"Well."

"You have, no doubt, about you some order from the Cardinal?"

"I have my *full powers.*"

"Show to the abbess, and tell her that some one will come and fetch me, either to-day or to-morrow, and that I am to follow the person who presents himself in your name."

"Very well."

"Don't forget to treat me harshly in speaking of me to the abbess."

"To what purpose?"

"I am the victim of the Cardinal. I must inspire confidence in that poor little Madame Bonacieux."

"That's true. Now, will you make me a report of all that has happened?"

"Why, I have related the events to you; you have a good memory, repeat what I have told you;—a paper may be lost."

"You are right; only let me know where to find you, that I may not lose my time in hunting for you about the neighborhood."

"Oh! I know this country well. I was brought up here."

"You will wait for me, then?"

"Let me reflect a little: ay, that will do, at Armentieres. A little town upon the Lys; I shall only have to cross the river, and I shall be in a foreign country."

"Just so! but it is understood you will only cross the river in case of danger."

"Certainly not. Lend me your lackey. I will leave him at the place I may quit, and he will conduct you to me."

"Write that name on a piece of paper, lest I should forget it; there is no fear of compromising yourself in that; a name of a town, is it not?"

"Eh! who knows? never mind," said My Lady, writing the name upon half a sheet of paper; "I will commit myself."

"That will do," said Rochefort, taking the paper from My Lady, folding it, and placing it in the lining of his hat; "besides, to make sure, I will do as children do, for fear of losing the paper, repeat the name as I go along. Now, is that all?"

"Commend me to the Cardinal!"

"Commend me to Satan!"

My Lady and Rochefort exchanged a smile and separated.

An hour afterwards, Rochefort set out at his horse's best speed; five hours after that he passed through Arras.

Our readers already know that he was recognized by d'Artag-

nan, and how that recognition, by inspiring fear in the four Musketeers, had given fresh activity to their journey.

CHAPTER LIX.

THE DROP OF WATER.

ROCHEFORT had scarcely departed, when Madame Bonacieux re-entered. She found My Lady with a smiling countenance.

"Well," said the young woman, "what you dreaded has happened; this evening, or to-morrow, the Cardinal will send some one to take you away!"

"Who told you that, my dear?" asked My Lady.

"I heard it from the mouth of the messenger himself."

"Then," said she, "he has well played his part."

"Who has?"

"He who just now presented himself to the abbess as a messenger from the Cardinal. That man," said My Lady, lowering her voice, "is my brother!"

"Your brother!" said Madame Bonacieux.

"Mind, no one must know this secret, my dear, but yourself. If you reveal it to any one whatever, I shall be lost, and perhaps you likewise!"

"Oh! good God!"

"Listen to me; this is what has happened. My brother, who was coming to my assistance, to take me away by force, if it were necessary, met with the emissary of the Cardinal, who was coming in search of me. He followed him. When arrived at a solitary and retired part of the road, he drew his sword and required the messenger to deliver up to him the papers of which he was the bearer; the messenger resisted; my brother killed him."

"Oh!" said Madame Bonacieux, with a shudder.

"Remember, that was the only means. Then my brother determined to substitute cunning for force. He took the papers, and presented himself here as the emissary to the Cardinal, and in an hour or two a carriage will come to take me away by the orders of his Eminence."

"I understand: your brother sends this carriage."

"Exactly so; but that is not all. That letter you have received, and which you believe to be from the Duchess de Chevreuse—"

"Well?"

"It is a forgery, a snare to prevent your making any resistance when the persons come to fetch you."

"But it is d'Artagnan that will come!"

"Do not deceive yourself. D'Artagnan and his friends are detained at the siege of La Rochelle."

"How do you know that?"

"My brother met some emissaries of the Cardinal in the uni-

form of Musketeers. You would have been summoned to the gate, you would have thought you went to meet friends, you would have been carried off, and conducted back again to Paris."

"Oh! good God! My senses fail me amidst such a chaos of iniquities. I feel, if this continues," said Madame Bonacieux, raising her hands to her forehead, "I shall go mad! what do you advise me to do? Good Heaven! You have more experience than I have. Speak; I will listen to your advice with the greatest gratitude."

"There would be a very simple means, very natural—"

"What? Speak!"

"To wait, concealed in the neighborhood, until you have satisfied yourself who the men were who came to ask for you."

"But where can I wait?"

"Oh! there is no difficulty in that; I shall stop and conceal myself at a few leagues from hence until my brother can rejoin me. Well! I can take you with me; we can conceal ourselves, and wait together."

"But I shall not be allowed to go; I am almost a prisoner here."

"As I am supposed to go in consequence of an order from the Cardinal, no one will believe you are anxious to follow me."

"Well?"

"Well! the carriage is at the door, you bid me adieu, you get upon the step to embrace me a last time; my brother's servant, who comes to fetch me, is told how to proceed; he makes a sign to the postilion, and we set off at a gallop."

"But d'Artagnan! d'Artagnan! if he should come!"

"Well! shall we not know it?"

"How?"

"Nothing more easy. We will send my brother's servant back to Bethune, and, as I told you, we can trust in him; he shall assume a disguise, and place himself in front of the convent. If the emissaries of the Cardinal arrive, he will take no notice; if they are M. d'Artagnan and his friends, he will bring them to us."

"He knows them, then?"

"Doubtless he does. Has he not seen M. d'Artagnan at my house?"

"Oh! yes, yes, you are right; in this way all may go well—all may be for the best; but do not go far from this place."

"Seven or eight leagues at most; we will keep on the frontiers, for instance; and at the first alarm, we can leave France."

"And what can we do there?"

"Wait. Now then, all is agreed; let us go down into the garden. Go along this corridor, down a little staircase, and you are in it."

"That will do—thank you!"

And the two women parted, exchanging affectionate smiles.

The principal thing for her then was, to keep Madame Bonacieux in her power. Madame Bonacieux was the very life of

d'Artagnan; more than his life, was the life of the woman he loved; this was, in case of ill-fortune, a means of treating and obtaining good conditions.

Now, this point was settled: Madame Bonacieux, without any suspicion, accompanied her; and, once concealed with her at Armentieres, it would be easy to make her believe that d'Artagnan was not come to Bethune. In a fortnight, at most, Rochefort would be back again; during that fortnight, besides, she should have time to think how she could best be revenged upon the four friends. At the end of an hour, she heard a soft voice calling her; it was Madame Bonacieux's.

On reaching the courtyard, they heard the noise of a carriage, which stopped at the gate.

My Lady listened.

"Do you hear anything?" said she.

"Yes, the rolling of a carriage."

"It is the one my brother sends for us."

"Oh! my God!"

"Come, come! courage!"

The bell of the convent gate was rung—My Lady was not mistaken. "Go up to your chamber," said she to Madame Bonacieux; "you have perhaps some jewels you would like to take with you."

"I have his letters," said she.

"Well! go and fetch them, and come to my apartment; we will snatch some supper; we shall perhaps travel part of the night, and must keep our strength up."

My Lady made some questions about the carriage; it was a chaise with three horses, driven by a postilion; Rochefort's lackey preceded it, as a courier.

My Lady was wrong in fearing that Madame Bonacieux would have any suspicions; the poor young woman was too pure to suppose that any female could be guilty of such perfidy; besides, the name of the Countess of Winter, which she had heard the abbess pronounce, was perfectly unknown to her, and she was even ignorant that a woman had had so great and so fatal a share in the misfortune of her life.

"You see," said she, when the lackey was gone out, "everything is ready. The abbess suspects nothing, and believes that I am fetched by the orders of the Cardinal. The man is gone to give his last orders; take a mouthful to eat, drink half a glass of wine, and let us be gone."

"Yes," said Madame Bonacieux, mechanically, "let us be gone."

My Lady made her a sign to sit down before her, poured out a small glass of Spanish wine for her, and helped her to the wing of a chicken.

"See!" said she, "if everything is not propitious; here is night coming on; by daybreak we shall have gained our retreat, and nobody can have any suspicion where we are. Come, courage!—take something."

Madame Bonacieux ate a few mouthfuls mechanically, and just touched the glass with her lips.

"Come! come!" said My Lady, lifting hers to her mouth, "do as I do."

But, at the moment the glass touched her lips, her hand remained suspended; she heard something on the road which sounded like the rattling of a distant gallop, and which drew nearer; and, almost at the same time, she heard the neighing of horses.

This noise acted upon her joy like a storm which awakens the sleeper in the midst of a happy dream; she grew pale, and ran to the window, whilst Madame Bonacieux, rising all in a tremble, supported herself upon her chair to avoid falling.

Nothing was yet to be seen, only they heard the galloping draw nearer.

"Oh! my God!" said Madame Bonacieux, "what is that noise?"

"That of either our friends or our enemies," said My Lady, with her terrible coolness; "stay where you are, I will tell you."

Madame Bonacieux remained standing, mute, motionless, and pale as a statue.

The noise became stronger, the horses could not be more than a hundred paces distant; if they were not yet to be seen, it was because the road made an elbow. The noise became so distinct that the horses might be counted by the sound of their hoofs.

My Lady looked as if her eyes would start; it was just light enough to allow her to see those who were coming.

All at once, at the turning of the road, she saw the glitter of laced hats and the waving of feathers; she counted two, then five, then eight horsemen; one of them preceded the rest by double the length of his horse.

My Lady uttered a stifled groan. In the first horseman she recognized d'Artagnan.

"Oh! heavens! oh! heavens!" cried Madame Bonacieux, "what is it? what is it?"

"It is the uniform of the Cardinal's guards! Not an instant to be lost! Let us fly! let us fly!"

"Oh! yes! let us fly!" repeated Madame Bonacieux, but without being able to make a step, fixed to the spot she stood on by terror.

They heard the horsemen pass under the windows.

"Oh! heaven! oh! heaven! you see my strength fails me, you see plainly I cannot walk: fly alone!"

"Fly alone! and leave you here! no, no, never!" cried My Lady.

All at once she remained still; a livid flash darted from her eyes; she ran to the table and poured into Madame Bonacieux's glass the contents of a ring, which she opened with singular quickness.

It was a grain of reddish color, which immediately faded.

Then taking the glass with a firm hand, she said:

"Drink, this wine will give you strength—drink!"

And she put the glass to the lips of the young woman, who drank mechanically.

"This is not the way that I wished to avenge myself," said My Lady, replacing the glass upon the table with an infernal smile, "but, faith! we do what we can!"

And she rushed out of the room.

Madame Bonacieux saw her go without being able to follow her; she heard the grating of the hinges of the opening gates, the noise of boots and spurs resounded on the stairs; there was a great murmur of voices, which continued to draw near, and amongst which it appeared to her she heard her own name pronounced.

All at once she uttered a loud cry of joy, and darted towards the door; she had recognized the voice.

"D'Artagnan!" cried she, "is it you? This way! this way!"

"Constance!" replied the young man, "where are you?"

At the same moment the door of the cell yielded to a shock, rather than was opened; several men rushed into the chamber; Madame Bonacieux had sunk into a chair, without the power of moving.

D'Artagnan threw a yet smoking pistol from his hand, and fell on his knees before his mistress; Athos replaced his in his belt; Porthos and Aramis, who held their drawn swords in their hands, returned them to their scabbards.

"Oh! d'Artagnan! my beloved! you are come, then, at last; you have not deceived me! it is indeed you!"

"Yes, yes, dear Constance! united at last!"

"Oh! it was in vain *she* told me you would not come. I hoped silently; I was not willing to fly; oh! how rightly I have done! how happy I am!"

At this word *she,* Athos, who had seated himself quietly, started up.

"*She!* what she?" asked d'Artagnan.

"Why, my companion; she who, from friendship for me, wished to take me from my persecutors—she was, mistaking you for the Cardinal's guards, has just fled away."

"Your companion!" cried d'Artagnan, becoming more pale than the white veil of his mistress, "of what companion are you speaking, dear Constance?"

"Of her whose carriage was at the gate, of a woman who calls herself your friend, to whom you have told everything."

"But her name, her name!" cried d'Artagnan; "can you not remember her name?"

"Yes, it was pronounced before me once; stop——but—it is very strange——oh! my God! my head swims—I cannot see!"

"Help! help! my friends! her hands are icy cold," cried d'Artagnan; "she will faint! great God, she is losing her senses!"

Whilst Porthos was calling for help with all the power of his strong voice, Aramis ran to the table to get a glass of water, but he stopped at seeing the horrible alteration that had taken

place in the countenance of Athos, who, standing before the table, his hair rising from his head, his eyes fixed in stupor, was looking at one of the glasses and appeared a prey to the most horrible doubt.

"Oh!" said Athos, "oh! no, it is impossible! God would not permit such a crime!"

"Water! water!" cried d'Artagnan—"water!"

"Oh! poor woman! poor woman!" murmured Athos, in a broken voice.

Madame Bonacieux opened her eyes under the kisses of d'Artagnan.

"She revives!" cried the young man. "Oh! my God! I thank thee!"

"Madame!" said Athos, "in the name of heaven, whose empty glass is this?"

"Mine," said the young woman in a dying voice.

"But who poured out the wine for you that was in this glass?"

"Oh! I remember," said Madame Bonacieux, "*the Countess of Winter.*"

The four friends uttered one and the same yell, but Athos's dominated over all the rest.

At that moment the countenance of Madame Bonacieux became livid, a fearful agony pervaded her frame, and she sank panting into the arms of Porthos and Aramis.

"In the name of heaven, run, call; Aramis! Porthos! call for help!"

"Useless!" said Athos, "useless! for the poison which *she* pours out there is no counter-poison!"

"Yes! yes! help! help!" murmured Madame Bonacieux, "help!"

Then, collecting all her strength, she took the head of the young man between her hands, looked at him for an instant as if her whole soul passed in that look, and, with a sobbing cry, pressed her lips to his.

"Constance!" cried d'Artagnan wildly.

A sigh escaped from the mouth of Madame Bonacieux, and dwelt for an instant on the lips of d'Artagnan—that sigh was the soul so loving reascending to heaven.

D'Artagnan held nothing but a corpse pressed in his arms.

The young man uttered a scream and fell by the side of his mistress as pale and as senseless as she was.

Porthos wept, Aramis pointed towards heaven, Athos made the sign of the cross.

At that moment a man appeared in the doorway almost as pale as those in the chamber, looked round him and saw Madame Bonacieux dead, and d'Artagnan fainting.

He appeared just at that moment of stupor which follows great catastrophes.

"I was not deceived," said he; "here is M. d'Artagnan, and you are his friends, Messieurs Athos, Porthos, and Aramis."

The persons whose names were thus pronounced looked at the stranger with astonishment; all three thought they knew him.

"Gentlemen," resumed the new-comer, "you are, as I am, in search of a woman, who," added he, with a terrible smile, "must have passed this way, for I see a corpse as her mark."

The three friends remained mute, for although the voice as well as the countenance reminded them of some one they had seen, they could not remember under what circumstances.

"Gentlemen," continued the stranger, "since you do not recognize a man who probably owes his life to you twice, I must name myself; I am the Lord Winter, brother-in-law of that woman."

The three friends uttered a cry of surprise.

Athos rose, and offering him his hand,—

"You are welcome, my lord," said he; "you are one of us."

"I set out five hours after her from Portsmouth," said Lord Winter, "and yet it appears that in spite of all your diligence you have arrived too late."

At that moment d'Artagnan opened his eyes.

He tore himself from the arms of Porthos and Aramis, and threw himself like a madman on the corpse of his mistress.

Athos rose, walked towards his friend with a slow and solemn step, embraced him tenderly, and as he burst into violent sobs, he said to him, with his noble and persuasive voice:

"Friend, be a man!—women weep for the dead, men avenge them!"

"Oh, yes!" cried d'Artagnan, "yes! if it be to avenge her, I am ready to follow you."

Athos took advantage of this moment of strength which the hope of vengeance restored to his unfortunate friend, to make a sign to Porthos and Aramis to go and fetch the superior.

They met her in the corridor, in great trouble and agitation at such strange events; she called for some of the nuns, who against all rules, found themselves in the presence of five men.

"Madame," said Athos, passing his arm under that of d'Artagnan, "we abandon to your pious care the body of that unfortunate woman. She was an angel on earth before being an angel in heaven. Treat her as one of your sisters. We will return some day to pray over her grave!"

D'Artagnan concealed his face in the bosom of Athos, and sobbed aloud.

"Weep!" said Athos, "weep! thou poor heart, full of love, youth, and life! Alas! would that I were able to weep as thou dost!"

And he drew away his friend, affectionate as a father, consoling as a priest, great as a man who has suffered much.

All five, followed by their lackeys, leading their horses, took their way to the town of Bethune, and stopped before the first tavern.

"But," said d'Artagnan, "shall we not pursue that woman?"

"Presently," said Athos; "I have measures to take."

"She will escape us," replied the young man; "and it will be your fault, Athos."

"I will be accountable for her," said Athos.

D'Artagnan had so much confidence in the word of his friend, that he hung down his head, and entered the house, without making a reply.

Porthos and Aramis looked at each other without comprehending whence Athos derived this assurance.

Lord Winter believed he spoke in this manner to soothe the grief of d'Artagnan.

"Now, gentlemen," said Athos, when he had ascertained there were five chambers disengaged in the hotel, "let every one retire to his own apartment; d'Artagnan requires to be alone, to weep and to sleep. I take charge of everything, be all of you at ease."

"It appears, however," said Lord Winter, "that if there be any measures to be taken against the countess it particularly concerns me: she is my sister-in-law."

"Nay," said Athos—"*she is my wife!*"

D'Artagnan smiled, for he was satisfied Athos was sure of his vengeance, when he revealed such a secret as that; Porthos and Aramis looked at each other, and changed color. Lord Winter thought Athos was mad.

"Now, all retire to your chamber," said Athos, "and leave me to act. You must perceive that in my quality of a husband this concerns me in particular. Only, d'Artagnan, if you have not lost it, give me the piece of paper which fell from that man's hat, upon which is written the name of the village of—"

"Ah!" said d'Artagnan, "I comprehend now; that name written in her hand."

"You see, then," said Athos, "there is a God in heaven, ever!"

CHAPTER LX.

THE MAN IN THE BLOOD-COLORED CLOAK.

The despair of Athos had given place to a concentrated grief, which only rendered more lucid the brilliant faculties of that extraordinary man.

Planchet, Grimaud, Bazin, and Mousqueton presented themselves, and received clear, positive and serious orders from Athos.

They were to set out for Armentieres the next morning at daybreak, and to go to Armentieres—each by a different route. Planchet, the most intelligent of the four, was to follow that by which the carriage had gone, upon which the four friends had fired, and which was accompanied, as may be remembered, by Rochefort's servant.

Athos set the lackeys to work first, because, since these

men had been in the service of himself and his friends, he had discovered in each of them different and essential qualities.

Then, lackeys who ask questions inspire less mistrust than masters; and meet with more sympathies among those they address.

Besides, My Lady knew the masters, and did not know the lackeys; whilst, on the contrary, the lackeys knew My Lady perfectly well.

All four were to meet the next day, at eleven o'clock; if they had discovered My Lady's retreat, three were to remain on guard, the fourth was to return to Bethune, to inform Athos, and serve as a guide to the four friends.

These dispositions arranged, the lackeys retired.

Athos then arose from his chair, girded on his sword, enveloped himself in his cloak, and left the hotel; it was nearly ten o'clock. At ten o'clock in the evening, as is well known, the streets in provincial towns are very little frequented; Athos, nevertheless, was visibly anxious to find some one of whom he could ask a question. At length he met a mendicant, who, coming up to Athos to ask charity, was offered half a crown to accompany him where he was going. The beggar hesitated at first, but at the sight of the piece of silver which shone in the darkness, he consented, and walked on before Athos.

When arrived at the angle of a street, he pointed to a small house, isolated, solitary, and dismal. Athos went towards the house, whilst the mendicant, who had received his reward, hobbled off as fast as his legs could carry him.

Athos went round the house before he could distinguish the door, amidst the red color in which it was painted; no light appeared through the chinks of the shutters, no noise gave reason to believe that it was inhabited—it was dark and silent as the tomb.

Three times Athos knocked without receiving any answer. At the third knock, however, steps were heard inside; the door at length was opened, and a man of high stature, pale complexion, and black hair and beard, appeared.

Athos and he exchanged some words in a low voice, then the tall man made a sign to the Musketeer that he might come in. Athos immediately took advantage of the permission, and the door was closed after them.

The man whom Athos had come so far to seek, and whom he had found with so much trouble, introduced him into his laboratory, where he was engaged in fastening together with iron wire the dry bones of a skeleton. All the frame was adjusted, except the head, which lay upon the table.

All the rest of the furniture indicated that the inhabitant of this house was engaged in the study of the natural sciences.

But there was no family, no servant; the tall man inhabited this house alone.

Athos cast a cold and indifferent glance upon the objects we have described, and, at the invitation of him he came to seek, he sat down near him.

Then he explained to him the cause of his visit, and the service he required of him; but scarcely had he expressed his request than the unknown, who remained standing before the Musketeer, drew back, with signs of terror, and refused. Then Athos took from his pocket a small paper, upon which were written two lines, accompanied by a signature and a seal, and presented them to him who had given too prematurely these signs of repugnance. The tall man had scarcely read these lines, seen the signature, and recognized the seal, when he bowed to denote that he had no longer any objection to make, and that he was ready to obey.

Athos required no more; he arose, bowed, went out, returned by the same way he came, re-entered the hotel and went to his apartment.

At daybreak, d'Artagnan came to him, and asked him "What was to be done?"

"Wait!" replied Athos.

Some minutes after, the superior of the convent sent to inform the Musketeers that the burial would take place at midday.

At the hour appointed, Lord Winter and the four friends repaired to the convent; the bells tolled, the chapel was open, but the grating of the choir was closed. In the middle of the choir the body of the victim, clothed in her novitiate dress, was exposed. On each side of the choir, and behind the gratings opening upon the convent, was assembled the whole community of the Carmelites, who listened to the divine service, and mingled their chants with the chants of the priests, without seeing the profane, or being seen by them.

At the door of the chapel d'Artagnan felt his courage fail again, and returned to look for Athos, but Athos had disappeared. He had returned to the hotel, and found Planchet impatiently waiting for him.

Everything was as Athos had foreseen.

Planchet had followed the road; like Athos, he had discovered the stains of blood; like Athos, he had remarked the spot where the horses had stopped; but he had gone further than Athos, so that at the village of Festubert, whilst drinking at an inn, he had learned, without asking a question, that the evening before at about half-past eight, a wounded man, who accompanied a lady traveling in a post-chaise, had been obliged to stop, being unable to go any further. The wound was attributed to thieves who had stopped the chaise in the wood. The man remained in the village; the lady had had a relay of horses, and continued her journey.

Planchet went in search of the postilion who had driven her, and found him. He had taken the lady as far as Fromelles, and from Fromelles she had set out for Armentieres. Plan-

chet took the cross-road, and by seven o'clock in the morning he was at Armentieres.

There was but one tavern, that of the post. Planchet went and presented himself as a lackey out of place, who was in search of a situation. He had not chated ten minutes with the people before he had learned that a lady had come there about eleven o'clock the night before, alone; had engaged a chamber, had sent for the master of the hotel, and told him that she was desirous to remain for some time in that neighborhood.

Planchet did not want to know any more. He hastened to the rendezvous, found the lackeys at their posts, placed them as sentinels at all the tavern issues, and came to find Athos, who had just received his information when his friends returned.

All their countenances were melancholy and anxious, even the mild countenance of Aramis.

"What is to be done?" said d'Artagnan.

"Wait," replied Athos.

Every one went to his own apartment.

At eight o'clock in the evening Athos ordered the horses to be saddled, and had Lord Winter and his friends informed that they must prepare for the expedition.

In an instant all five were ready. Every one examined his arms, and put them in order. Athos came down the last, and found d'Artagnan already mounted, and growing impatient.

"Patience!" cried Athos; "one of our party is still wanting."

The four horsemen looked round them with astonishment, for they sought uselessly in their minds who this other person they wanted could be.

At this moment Planchet brought out Athos's horse; the Musketeer leaped lightly into the saddle.

"Wait for me," cried he; "I will soon be back," and set off at a gallop.

In a quarter of an hour he returned, accompanied by a tall man, masked, and enveloped in a large red cloak.

Lord Winter and the three Musketeers looked at each other inquiringly. None of them could give the others any information, for all were ignorant who this man could be; nevertheless they felt convinced that this ought to be so, as it was done by Athos.

At nine o'clock, guided by Planchet, the little cavalcade set out, taking the route the carriage had taken.

It was a melancholy sight, that of these six men, traveling in silence, each plunged in his own thoughts, sad as despair, dark as doom.

CHAPTER LXI.

THE TRIAL.

It was a stormy and dark night; vast clouds covered the heavens, concealing the stars; the moon would not rise much before midnight.

Occasionally, by the light of a flash of lightning, which gleamed along the horizon, the road appeared before them, white and solitary; the flash extinct, all remained in darkness.

At the moment the little troop had passed Goskal, and were approaching the port, a man, sheltered beneath a tree, left the trunk of it, with which he had been confounded in the darkness, and advanced into the middle of the road, with his finger on his lips.

Athos recognized Grimaud.

"What's the matter?" cried Athos; "has she left Armentieres?"

Grimaud nodded.

"Where?" asked Athos.

Grimaud stretched out his hands in the direction of the Lys.

"Far?" asked Athos.

Grimaud showed his master his forefinger bent.

"Alone?" asked Athos.

Grimaud made a sign that she was.

"Gentlemen," said Athos, "she is alone, within half a league of us, in the direction of the river."

"That's well," said d'Artagnan; "lead us on, Grimaud."

Grimaud took his course across the country, and acted as a guide to the cavalcade.

Grimaud extended his arm, and by the blue splendor of the serpent of fire they distinguished a little isolated house, on the banks of the river, within a hundred paces of a ferry.

A light was seen at one window.

"This is the place," said Athos.

At this moment a man, who had been crouching in a ditch, jumped up and came towards them. It was Mousqueton; he pointed with his finger to the window with the light in it.

"She is there," said he.

"And Bazin?" asked Athos.

"While I kept my eye on the window, he guarded the door."

"Well done!" said Athos; "you are good and faithful servants."

Athos sprang from his horse, gave the bridle to Grimaud, and advanced towards the window, after having made a sign to the rest of the troop to go towards the door.

The little house was surrounded by a low quickset hedge of two or three feet high; Athos sprang over the hedge, and

went up to the window, which was without shutters, but had the half-curtain drawn closely.

He got upon the skirting-stone to enable him to look over the curtain.

By the light of a lamp he saw a woman enveloped in a mantle of a dark color, seated upon a joint-stool near the dying embers of a fire; her elbows were placed upon a mean table, and she leant her head upon her two hands, which were white as ivory.

He could not distinguish her countenance, but a sinister smile passed over the lips of Athos; he could not be deceived —it was the woman he sought.

At this moment one of the horses neighed; My Lady raised her head, saw the pale face of Athos close to the window, and screamed with terror.

Athos, perceiving that she had recognized him, pushed the window with his knee and hand; it yielded—the frame and glass were broken into shivers.

And Athos, like the spectre of vengeance, sprang into the room.

My Lady rushed to the door and opened it; but, still more pale and menacing than Athos, d'Artagnan stood on the sill of it.

My Lady drew back, uttering a shriek; d'Artagnan, believing she might have means of flight, and fearing she should escape, drew a pistol from his belt; but Athos raised his hand.

"Put back that weapon, d'Artagnan," said he; "this woman must be judged, not assassinated. Wait but a little, my friend, and you shall be satisfied. Come in, gentlemen."

D'Artagnan obeyed, for Athos had the solemn voice and the powerful gesture of a judge sent by heaven. Behind d'Artagnan entered Porthos, Aramis, Lord Winter, and the man in the blood-red cloak.

The four lackeys guarded the door and the window.

My Lady had sunk into a chair, with her hands extended, as if to conjure away this terrible apparition. On perceiving her brother-in-law, an agonized cry of surprise and fright burst from her lips.

"What do you want?" screamed My Lady.

"We want," said Athos, "Charlotte Backson, who first was called Countess de la Fere, and afterwards Lady Winter, Baroness of Sheffield."

"That is I!" murmured My Lady, in extreme terror; "what do you want with me?"

"We want to judge you according to your crime," said Athos; "you shall be free to defend yourself; justify yourself if you can. M. d'Artagnan, it is for you to accuse her first."

D'Artagnan advanced.

"Before God and before men," said he, "I accuse this wo-

man of having poisoned Constance Bonacieux, who died yesterday evening."

He turned towards Porthos and Aramis.

"We bear witness to this," said the two Musketeers, with one voice.

D'Artagnan continued:

"Before God and before men I accuse this woman of having attempted to poison me, in wine which she sent me from Villeroi, with a forged letter, as if that wine came from my friends. God preserved me, but a man died in my place."

"We bear witness to this," said Porthos and Aramis, in the same manner as before.

"Before God and before men, I accuse this woman of having urged me to murder the Count de Wardes; and of having employed assassins to shoot me; from whom I was again preserved by God's providence; but, as none can bear witness to these facts, I attest them myself—I have done," and d'Artagnan passed to the other side of the room, to Porthos and Aramis.

"It is your turn, my lord," said Athos.

The baron came forward.

"Before God and before men," said he, "I accuse this woman of having been the means of the assassination of the Duke of Buckingham."

"The Duke of Buckingham assassinated!" cried all present, with one voice.

"Yes," said the baron,—"assassinated. Upon receiving the warning letter you wrote to me, I caused this woman to be arrested, and gave her in charge to a loyal servant; she corrupted this man, she placed the poniard in his hand, she made him kill the duke; and at this moment, perhaps, the assassin is paying with his head for the crime of this fury!"

A shudder crept through the frames of the judges at the revelation of such unheard-of crimes.

"That is not all," resumed Lord Winter; "my brother, who made your son his heir, died in three hours, of a strange disorder, which left livid spots behind it all over the body. Sister, how did your husband die?"

"Horror! horror!" cried Porthos and Aramis.

"Assassin of Buckingham, of Felton, of my brother, I demand justice upon you, and I swear that if it is not granted to me, I will execute it myself."

And Lord Winter ranged himself by the side of d'Artagnan, leaving the place free for another accuser.

My Lady let her head sink between her two hands, and endeavored to recall her ideas, which whirled about in a mortal vertigo.

"It is my turn," said Athos, himself trembling as the lion trembles at the sight of the serpent; "it is my turn. I married that woman when she was a young girl; I married her

in opposition to the wishes of all my family; I gave her my wealth, I gave her my name; and one day I discovered that this woman was branded; this woman was marked with a fleur-de-lis on her left shoulder."

"Oh!" said My Lady, "I defy you to find any tribunal which pronounced such an infamous sentence against me—I defy you to find him who executed it."

"Silence!" cried a hollow voice. "It is for me to reply to that!" And the Man in the Red Cloak came forward in his turn.

"What is that? what is that?" cried My Lady, suffocated by terror, her hair unknotting, and rising over her livid countenance as if alive.

All eyes were turned towards this man; for to all except Athos he was unknown.

And even Athos looked at him with as much stupefaction as the rest, for he could not conceive how he could in any way be mixed up with the horrible drama which was then being unfolded.

After having approached My Lady with a slow and solemn step, so that the table alone separated them, he took off his mask.

My Lady for some time examined with increasing terror that pale face, enframed in its black hair, beard and whiskers, the only expression of which was icy impassibility—all at once she yelled, rising and retreating to the very wall:——

"No, no! it is an infernal apparition! It cannot be he! Help, help!" screamed she, turning towards the wall, as if she would tear an opening with her hands.

"Who are you, then?" cried all the witnesses of this scene.

"Ask that woman," said the Man in the Red Cloak; "for you may plainly see she knows me!"

"The executioner of Lille! the headsman of Lille!" cried My Lady, a prey to wild terror, and clinging with her hands to the wall to avoid falling.

Every one drew back, and the Man in the Red Cloak remained standing alone in the middle of the room.

"Oh! pardon! pardon!" cried the miserable woman, falling on her knees.

The headsmen waited in silence, and then,——

"I told you so; I was sure she would know me," resumed he. "Yes, I am the deathsman of Lille, and this is my story."

All eyes were fixed upon the man, whose words were listened to with anxious attention as he related the ghastly record of Charlotte's early misdeeds, already stated in our terms and at length.

"That is the crime of which I accuse her; that is the cause of her being branded."

"M. d'Artagnan," said Athos, "what is the penalty you demand against this woman?"

"The punishment of death," said d'Artagnan.

"Lord Winter," continued Athos, "what is the penalty you demand against this woman?"

"The punishment of death," replied Lord Winter.

"Messieurs Porthos and Aramis," again said Athos, "you who are her judges, what is the sentence you pronounce upon this woman?"

"The punishment of death," replied the Musketeers, in a stern, hollow voice.

My Lady uttered a frightful shriek, and dragged herself along several paces towards her judges upon her knees.

Athos stretched out his hand towards her.

"Charlotte Backson, Countess de la Fere, Lady Winter," said he ,"your crimes have wearied men on earth and God in heaven. If you know any prayer, say it; for you are doomed, and you must die."

At these words, which left no hope, My Lady raised herself up to her full height, and endeavored to speak, but her strength failed her; she felt that a powerful and implacable hand seized her by the hair, and dragged her away as irrevocably as fatality drags man; she did not, therefore, even attempt to make the least resistance, and went out of the cottage.

Lord Winter, d'Artagnan, Athos, Porthos, and Aramis went out close behind her and the executioner. The lackeys followed their masters, and the chamber was left solitary, with its broken window, its open door, and its smoky lamp burning dimly on the table.

CHAPTER LXII.

THE EXECUTION.

It was near midnight; the moon, lessened by its decline and reddened by the last traces of the storm, arose behind the little town of Armentieres, which showed against its pale light the dark outline of its houses, and the outline of its high belfry. In front of them the Lys rolled its waters like a river of melted lead; whilst on the other side was a black mass of trees, cutting a stormy sky, invaded by large coppery clouds, which created a sort of twilight amidst the night.

From time to time a broad sheet of lightning opened the horizon in its whole width, darted like a serpent over the black mass of trees, and, like a terrible scimitar, divided the heavens and the waters into two parts.

Two of the lackeys now led, or rather dragged, along the lady by her arms; the executioner walked behind them, and Lord Winter, d'Artagnan, Porthos and Aramis walked behind the executioner. Planchet and Bazin came last.

The two lackeys led the lady to the bank of the river.

Her mouth was mute; but her eyes spoke with their inexpressible eloquence, supplicating by turns each of those she looked at.

Being a few paces in advance, she whispered to the lackeys:

"A thousand pistoles to each of you, if you will assist my escape; but if you deliver me up to your masters, I have, near at hand, avengers who will make you pay for my death very dearly."

Grimaud hesitated; Mousqueton trembled in all his members.

Athos, who heard My Lady's voice, came sharply up; Lord Winter did the same.

"Change these lackeys," said he, "she has spoken to them, —they are no longer safe."

Planchet and Bazin were called forward, and took the places of Grimaud and Mousqueton.

When they arrived on the banks of the river, the executioner approached My Lady, and bound her hands and feet.

Then she broke silence to cry out:

"You are base cowards, miserable assassins, ten men combined to murder one woman; beware! if I am not released, I shall be avenged."

"You are not a woman," said Athos, coldly and sternly, "you do not belong to the human species; you are a demon escaped from hell, to which place we are going to send you back again."

"Ah! you virtuous men!" said My Lady, "but please to remember that he who shall touch a hair of my head is himself an assassin."

"The executioner can kill, madame, without being on that account an assassin," said the Man in the Red Cloak, striking upon his immense sword; "this is the last judge; that is all: *Nachrichter*, as our neighbors, the Germans, say."

And as he bound her whilst saying these words, My Lady uttered two or three wild screams, which produced a strange and melancholy effect in flying away into the night, and losing themselves in the depths of the woods.

"If I am guilty, if I have committed the crimes you accuse me of," shrieked My Lady, "take me before a court; you are not judges; you cannot condemn me!"

"Why, I did offer you Newgate and Tyburn," said Lord Winter, "why did you not accept?"

"Because I am not willing to die!" cried My Lady, struggling—"because I am too young to die!"

"The woman you poisoned at Bethune was still younger than you, and yet she is dead," said d'Artagnan.

"I will enter a cloister, I will become a nun," said My Lady.

"You were in a cloister," said the excutioner, "and you left it to destroy my brother."

My Lady uttered a cry of terror, and sank upon her knees.

The executioner took her up in his arms, and was carrying her towards the boat.

"Oh! heavens!" cried she, "are you going to drown me?"

These cries had something so heart-rending in them that d'Artagnan, who had been at first the most eager in pursuit, sank down on the stump of a tree, and leant down his head, covering his ears with the palms of his hands; and yet, notwithstanding, he could not help hearing her cry and threaten.

D'Artagnan was the youngest of all; his heart failed him.

"Oh! I cannot behold this frightful spectacle!" said he; "I cannot consent that this woman should die thus!"

My Lady heard these few words, and caught at a shadow of hope.

"D'Artagnan!" cried she, "remember that I loved you!"

The young man rose, and made a step towards her.

But Athos arose, likewise, drew his sword, and placed himself between them.

"One step further, d'Artagnan," said he, "and dearly as I love you, we cross swords."

D'Artagnan sank on his knees and prayed.

"Come!" continued Athos, "executioner, do your duty."

"Willingly, my lord," said the executioner; "for, as I am a good Catholic, I firmly believe I am acting justly in performing my functions on this woman."

"That's well."

Athos made a step towards My Lady.

"I pardon you," said he, "the ill you have done me; I pardon you for my blasted future, my lost honor, my defiled love, and my salvation forever compromised by the despair into which you have cast me. Die in peace!"

Lord Winter advanced in his turn.

"I pardon you," said he, "the poisoning of my brother, the assassination of his Grace the Duke of Buckingham; I pardon you the death of poor Felton, I pardon you the attempts upon my own person. Die in peace."

"And I," said d'Artagnan. "Pardon me, madame, for having by a trick, unworthy of a gentleman, provoked your anger; and I, in exchange, pardon you the murder of my poor love, and your cruel vengeance against me. I pardon you, and I weep for you. Die in peace."

"I am lost!" murmured My Lady, in English; "I must die!"

Then she rose up herself, and cast around her one of those piercing looks which seemed to dart from an eye of flame.

She saw nothing.

She listened, and she heard nothing.

"Where am I to die?" said she.

"On the other bank," replied the executioner.

Then he placed her in the boat, and as he was going to set foot in it himself, Athos handed him a purse of gold.

"Here," said he, "is the pay for the execution, that it may be plain we act as judges."

"That is correct," said the executioner; "and now, in her turn let this woman see that I am not fulfilling my trade, but my duty."

And he threw the money into the river.

The boat moved off towards the left-hand shore of the Lys, bearing the guilty woman and the executioner; all the others remained on the right-hand bank, where they fell on their knees.

The boat glided along the ferry-rope under the shadow of a pale cloud which hung over the water at the moment.

The troop of friends saw it gain the opposite bank; the persons cut the red-tinted horizon with a black shade.

My Lady, during the passage, had contrived to untie the cord which fastened her feet; on coming near to the bank, she jumped lightly on shore and took to flight.

But the soil was moist: on gaining the top of the bank, she slipped and fell upon her knees.

She was struck, no doubt, with a superstitious idea; she conceived that heaven denied its succor, and she remained in the attitude she had fallen in, with her head drooping and her hands clasped.

Then they saw from the other bank the executioner raise both his arms slowly, a moonbeam fell upon the blade of the large sword, the two arms swept with a sudden force; they heard the hissing of the scimitar and the cry of the victim, then a truncated mass sank beneath the blow.

The executioner then took off his red cloak, spread it upon the ground, laid the body on it, threw in the head, tied all up with the four corners, lifted in onto his back, and got into the boat again.

When arrived in the middle of the stream, he stopped the boat, and suspending his burden over the water,—

"So ever be carried out the justice of God!" cried he with a loud voice.

And he let the body drop into the depths of the waters, which closed over it.

Within three days the four Musketeers were in Paris; they had not exceeded their leave of absence, and that same evening went to pay their customary visit to M. de Treville.

"Well, gentlemen," said the brave captain, "I hope you have enjoyed your excursion."

"Prodigiously!" replied Athos, for himself and his companions.

CHAPTER LXIII.

CONCLUSION.

On the sixth of the following month, the King, in compliance with the promise he had made the Cardinal to return to La Rochelle, left his capital still in amazement at the news which began to spread of Buckingham's assassination.

Although warned that the man she had loved so much was in great danger, the Queen, when his death was announced to her, would not believe the fact, and even imprudently exclaimed:

"It is false; he has just written to me!"

The joy of the King was great, he did not even give himself the trouble to dissemble it, and displayed it with affectation before the Queen. Louis XIII., like all weak minds, was miserably wanting in generosity.

But the King soon again became indisposed.

The return to La Rochelle, therefore, was profoundly dull. Our four friends, in particular, astonished their comrades; they traveled together, side by side, with spiritless eyes and heads depressed. Athos alone, from time to time, raised his expansive brow; a flash kindled in his eyes, and a bitter smile passed over his lips; then, like his comrades, he sank again into his reveries.

As soon as the escort arrived in any city, when they had conducted the King to his quarters, the four friends either retired to their own, or to some secluded cabaret where they neither drank nor played; they only conversed in a low voice, looking around attentively that no one overheard them.

One day, when the King had halted to fly the pie, and the four friends, according to their custom, instead of following the sport, had stopped at a tavern on the high-road, a man, coming from La Rochelle on horseback, pulled up at the door to drink a glass of wine, and darted a searching glance into the chamber in which the four Musketeers were sitting.

"Hilloa! M. d'Artagnan!" said he, "is not that you I see yonder?"

D'Artagnan raised his head and uttered a cry of joy. It was the man he called his phantom, it was his antagonist of Meung, of the Rue des Fossoyeurs and of Arras.

D'Artagnan drew his sword, and sprang towards the door.

But this time, instead of avoiding him, the unknown jumped from his horse, and advanced to meet d'Artagnan.

"Ah!" said the young man, "I have met with you, then. at last! this time, I will answer for it, you shall not escape me!"

"Neither is it my intention, monsieur, for this time I was seeking you; in the name of the King, I arrest you."

"How! what do you say?" cried d'Artagnan.

"I say that you must surrender your sword to me, monsieur,

and that without resistance; the safety of your head depends upon your compliance."

"Who are you then?" demanded d'Artagnan, lowering the point of his sword, but without yet surrendering it.

"I am the Chevalier de Rochefort," answered the other, "the equerry of Cardinal Richelieu, and I have orders to conduct you to his Eminence."

"We are returning to his Eminence, M. le Chevalier," said Athos, advancing; "and you will please to accept the word of M. d'Artagnan, that he will go straight to La Rochelle."

"I must place him in the hands of guards who will take him to the camp."

"We will be his guards, monsieur, upon our words as gentlemen, but, upon our words as gentlemen likewise," added Athos, knitting his brow, "M. d'Artagnan shall not leave us."

The Chevalier de Rochefort cast a glance backward, and saw that Porthos and Aramis had placed themselves between him and the gate; he therefore was convinced that he was completely at the mercy of these four men.

"Gentlemen," said he, "if M. d'Artagnan will surrender his sword to me, and join his word to yours, I will be satisfied with your promise to convey M. d'Artagnan to the quarters of the Cardinal."

"You have my word, monsieur, and here is my sword."

"This suits me the better," said Rochefort, "as I wish to continue my journey."

"If it is for the purpose of rejoining My Lady," said Athos, coolly, "it is usless, you will not find her."

"What has become of her, then?" asked Rochefort, eagerly.

"Come back with us to the camp and you shall know."

Rochefort remained for a moment undecided, then, as they were only a day's journey from Surgeres, to which place the Cardinal was to come to meet the King, he resolved to follow Athos's advice and go with them.

Besides, this return presented him the advantage of watching over his prisoner.

They resumed their route.

On the morrow, at three o'clock in the afternoon, they arrived at Surgeres. The Cardinal there awaited Louis XIII. The Minister and the King exchanged numerous caresses, felicitating each other upon the fortunate chance which had freed France from the inveterate enemy who set on all Europe against her. After which, the Cardinal, who had been informed that d'Artagnan was arrested, and who was anxious to see him, took leave of the King.

On returning in the evening to his quarters, the Cardinal found d'Artagnan, without his sword, and the three Musketeers armed, standing before the door of the house.

This time, as he was well attended, he looked at them sternly and made a sign for d'Artagnan to follow him.

D'Artagnan obeyed.

"We shall wait for you, d'Artagnan," said Athos, loud enough for the Cardinal to hear him.

His Eminence bent his brow, and stopped for an instant but then kept on his way, without uttering a single word.

D'Artagnan entered after the Cardinal, and behind d'Artagnan the door was guarded.

His Eminence went to the chamber which served him as a study, and made a sign to Rochefort to bring in the young Musketeer.

Rochefort obeyed and retired.

D'Artagnan remained alone in front of the Cardinal; this was his second interview with Richelieu, and he afterwards confessed that he felt well assured it would be his last.

Richelieu remained standing, leaning against the mantelpiece; a table was between him and d'Artagnan.

"Monsieur," said the Cardinal, "you have been arrested by my orders."

"So I have been informed, Monseigneur."

"Do you know why?"

"No, Monseigneur, for the only deed for which I should be arrested is still unknown to your Eminence."

Richelieu looked steadfastly at the young man.

"Indeed!" said he, "what does that mean?"

"If Monseigneur will have the goodness to tell me, in the first place, what crimes are imputed to me, I will then tell your Eminence what I have really done."

"Crimes are imputed to you that have brought down much more lofty heads than yours, monsieur," said the Cardinal.

"What are they, Monseigneur?" said d'Artagnan, with a calmness that astonished the Cardinal himself.

"You are charged with having corresponded with the enemies of the kingdom; you are charged with having surprised state secrets; you are charged with having endeavored to thwart the plans of your general."

"And who charges me with this, Monseigneur?" said d'Artagnan, who had no doubt the accusation came from My Lady; "a woman branded by the justice of our realm—who has espoused one man in France and another in England—a woman who poisoned her second husband, and who attempted both to poison and assassinate me!"

"What is all this, monsieur?" cried the Cardinal, astonished; "and what woman are you speaking of thus?"

"Of Lady Winter," replied d'Artagnan—"yes, of whose crimes your Eminence is doubtless ignorant, because you have honored her with your confidence."

"Monsieur," said the Cardinal, "if Lady Winter has committed the crimes you lay to her charge, she shall be punished."

"She is punished, Monseigneur."

"And who has punished her?"

"We have."

"Is she in prison?"

"She is dead."

"Dead!" repeated the Cardinal, who could not believe what he heard—"dead! Did you say she was dead?"

"Three times she attempted to kill me, and I pardoned her; but she murdered the woman I loved. Then my friends and I took her, tried her, and condemned her."

D'Artagnan then related the poisoning of Madame Bonacieux in the convent of the Carmelites of Bethune, the trial in the solitary house, and the execution on the banks of the Lys.

A shudder crept through the body of the Cardinal, who, it may be observed, was not easily made to shudder.

But all at once, as if undergoing the influence of a secret thought, his countenance, till that moment gloomy, cleared up by degrees, and recovered perfect serenity.

"So" said the Cardinal, in a tone that contrasted strongly with the severity of his words, "you have constituted yourselves judges, without remembering that they who punish without license to punish are assassins?"

"Monseigneur, I swear to you that I never for an instant had the intention of defending my head against you; I willingly will submit to any punishment your Eminence may please to inflict upon me; I do not hold life dear enough to be afraid of death."

"Yes, I know you are a man of a stout heart, monsieur," said the Cardinal, in an almost kind tone; "I can therefore tell you beforehand you shall be tried and even condemned."

"Another might reply that he had his pardon in his pocket. I will content myself with saying, Issue your orders, Monseigneur; I am ready."

"Your pardon?" said Richelieu, surprised.

"Yes, Monseigneur," said d'Artagnan.

"And signed by whom—by the King?"

And the Cardinal pronounced these words with a singular expression of contempt.

"No; by your Eminence."

"By me? You must be mad, monsieur!"

"Monseigneur will doubtless recognize his own writing."

And d'Artagnan presented the precious piece of paper which Athos had forced from My Lady, and which he had given to d'Artagnan, to serve him as a safeguard.

His Eminence took the paper, and read in a slow voice, dwelling upon every syllable:

> It is by my orders that the bearer of this paper did what he has just done.
> At the camp of Rochelle, this fifth of August, 1628.
>
> RICHELIEU.

The Cardinal, after having read these two lines, sank into a

profound reverie; but he did not return the paper to d'Artagnan.

"He is meditating what sort of punishment he shall put me to death by," said d'Artagnan to himself. "Let him; by my faith! he shall see how a gentleman can die!"

The young Musketeer was then in an excellent disposition to suffer heroically.

Richelieu still continued thinking, twisting and untwisting the paper in his hands.

At length he raised his head, fixed his eagle look upon that loyal, open, and intelligent countenance read upon that face, furrowed with tears, all the sufferings he had endured in the course of the last month, and reflected for the third or fourth time how much that youth of twenty-one years of age had before him, and what resources his activity, his courage, and his shrewd understanding might offer to a good master.

In another respect the crimes, the strength of mind, and the infernal genius of My Lady had more than once terrified him; he felt something like a secret joy at having got rid of this dangerous accomplice.

He slowly tore the paper which d'Artagnan had generously placed in his hand.

"I am lost!" said d'Artagnan to himself.

And be bowed profoundly, like a man who says, "Lord, thy will be done!"

The Cardinal went up to the table, and, without sitting down, wrote a few lines upon a parchment of which two-thirds were already filled up, and affixed his seal to it.

"That is my condemnation," thought d'Artagnan; "he will spare me the Bastile, or the tediousness of a trial. That's very kind of him."

"Here, monsieur," said the Cardinal to the young man, "I have taken from you one warrant signed blank to give you another. The name is wanting in this commission; you can write it yourself."

D'Artagnan took the paper hesitatingly and cast his eyes over it; it was a lieutenant's commission in the Musketeers. He fell at the feet of the Cardinal.

"Monseigneur," said he, "my life is yours—henceforward dispose of it. But this favor which you bestow upon me I do not merit; I have three friends who are more meritorious and more worthy——"

"You are a brave youth, d'Artagnan," interrupted the Cardinal, tapping him familiarly on the shoulder, charmed at having subdued this rebellious nature. "Do with this commission what you will; only remember that though the name be in blank, it was to you that I gave it."

"I shall never forget it," replied d'Artagnan; "your Eminence may be certain of that."

The Cardinal turned round, and said in a loud voice:

"Rochefort!"

The chevalier, who no doubt was near the door, entered immediately.

"Rochefort," said the Cardinal, "you see M. d'Artagnan—I receive him among the number of my friends; embrace, then, and be prudent, if you have any wish to preserve your heads"

Rochefort and d'Artagnan saluted coolly; but the Cardinal was there observing them with his vigilant eye.

They left the chamber at the same time.

"We shall meet again, shall we not, monsieur?"

"When you please," said d'Artagnan.

"An opportunity will offer itself," replied Rochefort.

"What's that?" said the Cardinal, opening the door.

The two men smiled at each other, shook hands, and bowed to his Eminence.

"We were beginning to grow impatient," said Athos.

"Well, here I am, my friends," replied d'Artagnan, "not only free, but in favor."

"Tell us all about it."

"This evening."

Accordingly, that same evening d'Artagnan repaired to the quarters of Athos, whom he found in a fair way of emptying a bottle of Spanish wine, an occupation which he religiously went through every night.

He related all that had taken place between the Cardinal and himself, and, drawing the commission from his pocket,——

"Here, my dear Athos," said he, "this belongs to you naturally."

Athos smiled with one of his sweet and expressive smiles.

"My friend," said he, "for Athos this is too much, for the Count de la Fere it is too little; keep the commission—it is yours; alas! you have purchased it dearly enough."

D'Artagnan left Athos's chamber, and went to that of Porthos.

He found him clothed in a magnificent dress covered with splendid embroidery, admiring himself before a glass.

"Ah, ah! is that you, friend d'Artagnan?" exclaimed he; "how do you think these garments fit me, eh?"

"Wonderfully well," said d'Artagnan; "but I am come to offer you a dress which will become you still better."

"What's that?" asked Porthos.

"That of a lieutenant of Musketeers."

D'Artagnan related to Porthos the substance of his interview with the Cardinal, and, taking the commission from his pocket, said:

"Here, my friend write your name upon it and become my officer."

Porthos cast his eyes over the commission, and returned it to d'Artagnan, to the great astonishment of the young man.

"Yes," said he—"yes, that would flatter me very much, but I should not have time enough to enjoy the distinction. During our expedition to Bethune the husband of my duchess died, so that, my dear friend, the coffer of the defunct holding out its arms to me, I shall marry the widow; look here, I at this moment was trying on my wedding suit. No, keep the lieutenancy, my dear fellow—keep it."

And he returned the commission to d'Artagnan.

The young man then entered the apartment of Aramis.

He found him kneeling before a praying-stand, with his head leaning upon an open book of prayer.

He described to him the interview with the Cardinal, and, for the third time drawing his commission from his pocket,

"You, our friend, our intelligence, our invisible protector," said he, "accept this commission; you have merited it more than any of us by your wisdom and your counsels, always followed by such happy results."

"Alas! my dear friend," said Aramis, "our late adventures have disgusted me with life and with the sword; this time my determination is irrevocably taken; after the siege I shall enter the Lazarists. Keep the commission, d'Artagnan—the profession of arms suits you; you will be a brave and adventurous captain."

D'Artagnan, his eye moist with gratitude, though beaming with joy, went back to Athos, whom he found still at table, contemplating the charms of his last glass of Malaga by the light of his lamp.

"Well," said he, "and they likewise have refused me!"

"That, my dear friend, is because nobody is more worthy than yourself."

And he took a pen, wrote the name of d'Artagnan on the commission, and returned it to him.

"I shall then no longer have friends," said the young man; "alas! nothing but bitter recollections."

And he let his head sink upon his hands, whilst two large tears rolled down his cheeks.

"You are young," replied Athos, "and your bitter recollections have time to be changed into sweet remembrances."

EPILOGUE.

La Rochelle, deprived of the assistance of the English fleet and of the reinforcements promised by Buckingham, surrendered after a siege of a year.

D'Artagnan took possession of his rank. Porthos left the service, and in the course of the following year married Madame Coquenard; the so much coveted coffer contained 800,000 livres.

Mousqueton had a magnificent livery, and enjoyed the satisfaction he had been ambitious of all his life—that of standing behind a gilded carriage.

Aramis, after a journey into Lorraine, disappeared all at once, and ceased to write to his friends; they learned, at a later period, by Madame de Chevreuse, who told it to two or three of her intimates, that he had taken the habit in a convent of Nancy.

Bazin became a lay brother.

Athos remained a Musketeer under the command of d'Artagnan till the year 1631, at which period, after a journey which he made to Couraine, he also quitted the service, under the pretext of having inherited a small property in Roussillon.

Grimaud followed Athos.

D'Artagnan fought three times with Rochefort, and wounded him at each encounter.

"I shall most likely kill you at the fourth," said he to him, holding out his hand to assist him to rise.

"We had much better leave off as we are, both for you and for me," answered the wounded man. "After all! I am much more your friend than you think; for, from our very first encounter, I could, by saying a word to the Cardinal, have had your head cut off."

They this time embraced heartily, and without retaining any malice.

Planchet obtained from Rochefort the rank of sergeant in the guards.

M. Bonacieux lived on very quietly, perfectly ignorant what had become of his wife, and caring very little about the matter. One day he had the imprudence to intrude himself upon the memory of the Cardinal, who had him informed that he would provide for him, so that he should never want for anything in future. In fact, M. Bonacieux, having left his house at seven o'clock in the evening to go to the Louvre, never appeared again in the Rue des Fossoyeurs; the opinion of those who seemed to be the best informed was, that he was fed and lodged in some royal castle, at the expense of his generous Eminence.

So the enemies of our friends rest in the grave, or in that grave of human contrivance, the prison. But time does not rest, and those readers who desire to renew their acquaintance may do so in the work entitled "Twenty Years After."

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